



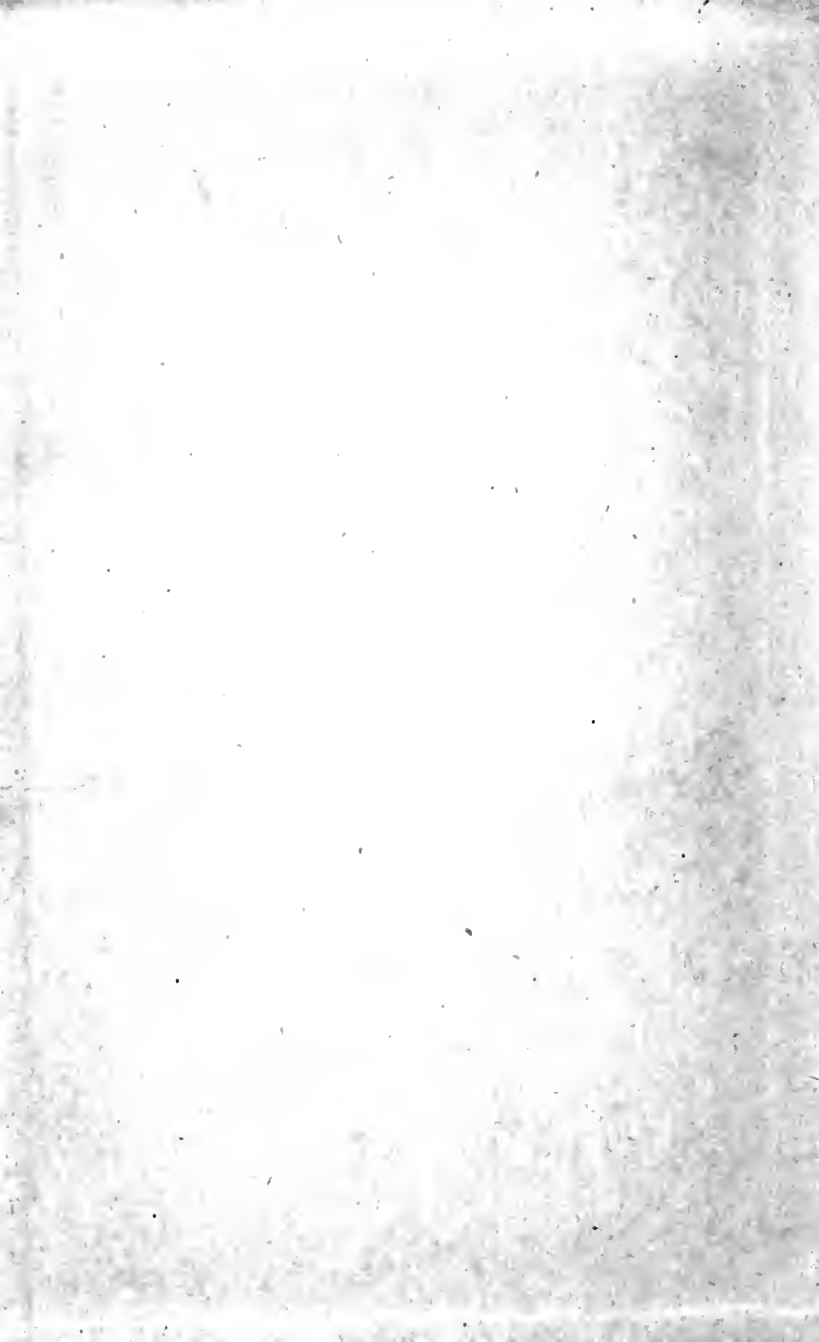
STEP BY STEP

MRS. GEORGE SHELDON DOWNS

Author of

KATHERINE'S SHEAVES

III



~~70~~

50.

To Bud X

With Love

From your
Sister Cornelia

~~Very~~ Xmas

HERMAN CARL
LAMPTON

DEC. 1920

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"I will never build up my own fortune by robbing my neighbor."

Frontispiece

Page 231

STEP BY STEP

A Story of High Ideals

By

MRS. GEORGE SHELDON DOWNS

Author of "Katherine's Sheaves"



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STATIONERS' HALL

STEP BY STEP

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Step by Step

A Story of High Ideals

CHAPTER I

It was a great day in the thriving New Hampshire town of —, the long-anticipated day of the County Fair; an important event, interesting alike to old and young, high and low, rich and poor, who, with one accord, yearly wended their way toward the spacious grounds set apart for this purpose, and abandoned themselves, for the time being, to the enjoyment of the various attractions prepared for their entertainment and profit.

As the hour appointed for the racing—the great feature of the occasion—drew near, streams of pedestrians poured into the enclosure, while vehicles of every description, filled with gay and eager sight-seers, rolled in through the wide gateway, and sought favorable vantage ground from which to overlook the track and the approaching equine contests for speed and purse.

Just outside the great gate a boy of perchance twelve summers might have been seen kneeling upon the ground, close beside the high board fence, his right eye peering through a convenient knot-hole,

where, apparently oblivious to all else, he was absorbed in watching the animated scene within that charmed enclosure, and from which, for lack of the price of a ticket, he was pitilessly debarred.

He was a sturdy-looking youth, straight as a young Indian and well formed, but very poorly clad; so conspicuously shabby, indeed, that he seemed a grotesquely incongruous figure thrust upon that festive scene, and would have made a quaintly pathetic subject for the skillful brush of even the immortal and prolific Murillo, who so vividly portrayed the gamin of the streets.

His clothing was badly faded and worn, generous patches adorning both elbows of his jacket; his trousers, of a different material, had evidently been made for an older boy and had seen prolonged and active service, as numerous rents and many intricate stitches abundantly testified; while the broken and discolored straw hat, which had slipped from his well-shaped head and lay unheeded on the ground beside him, gave evidence of several season's wear and tear in both storm and shine.

He wore no shoes or stockings, and his deeply tanned ankles and travel-stained feet showed many a cruel callous and stone-bruise.

But at the present moment neither discomfort nor shabbiness appeared to cause him the least concern, for he was lost to all thought of self in his contemplation of the enthralling scenes on the other side of that high board fence, and doubtless would have held undisputed possession of that blessed knot-

hole for an indefinite period but for an incident, which, though of no special significance at the time, was destined to have an important influence both upon the boy's own life and the future of others.

Presently a handsome carriage, drawn by a pair of sleek, beautiful thoroughbreds, black as Erebus and resplendent in silver-mounted harness, rolled up to the gate and came to a stop.

There were four people in the vehicle. A fine-looking man with his fourteen-year-old son occupied the front seat, and a richly dressed lady with a dainty little miss of ten sat behind them.

While the gentleman was searching his pockets for his stockholder's pass a gust of wind suddenly whisked the hat from the golden head of the pretty maiden and whirled it, with seeming design, straight down upon the ragged urchin by the fence.

"Oh, papa, my hat!" exclaimed a sweet, childish voice, whereupon the startled boy on the ground turned a bronzed face and a pair of great, surprised brown eyes upon the occupants of the carriage, just as a second flurry caught up the tasteful combination of flowers and ribbons and sailed away in another direction with it.

The lad on the front seat started up, and was about to spring to the earth in pursuit of the fugitive head-gear, when the ragamuffin at the knot-hole called out cheerily:

"Hold on, there! I'll get it."

Springing to his feet he darted off like a flash and succeeded in capturing the fluttering finery a few

rods away, when running swiftly back to the carriage, he passed it up to its youthful owner with a smile and an air of triumph that betrayed not a little pride in view of his athletic achievement on her behalf.

"Thank you, thank you. And, oh, my! can't you *run!*" cried the appreciative girl, as her dancing blue eyes looked down into his, so big and brown, and a pair of rose-hued lips smiled hearty approval of his timely service.

"You certainly did make very good time, my boy; here's a dime for your trouble," observed the gentleman, as he leaned forward to pass him the coin.

But the youth drew back a pace or two, flushing to his brows as his glance fell upon the piece of silver.

"You are welcome, sir," he gravely replied.

"And you won't take the money?" questioned the man, a note of surprise in his tone.

"No, sir; thank you," and the look the boy lifted to the pretty child on the back seat plainly indicated that he felt amply rewarded by merely having been allowed to serve her.

The gentleman regarded him curiously.

He had a good face, with clear, frank eyes that looked straight back at him, thus bespeaking innate honesty and purity, while there was an earnestness in their depths which indicated that he possessed an unusually thoughtful nature for one of his years; and the owner of the handsome equipage was im-

pressed that he was no ordinary boy, notwithstanding his generally forlorn and poverty-stricken appearance.

"Would you like to earn a quarter?" he inquired with sudden inspiration and a suggestive emphasis upon the verb.

"You can bet I would, sir," was the quick response, the clear young voice thrilling with boyish eagerness.

"Well, then, I want some one to watch my team while we visit the exhibition hall. Trot inside the grounds and follow the carriage. Let this boy pass," the gentleman concluded, with a nod to the gatekeeper, as, having produced his pass, he chirruped to his horses to go on.

The youth needed no second bidding. He made a vigorous dive for his own hat, jammed it down upon his head, and was on the other side of the fence in a trice, every nerve in his active young body tingling with delight in view of the rare good fortune that had so unexpectedly come to him—to have a free pass to the County Fair and an opportunity to earn a quarter besides!

"Why, papa, you don't need anyone to watch the team!" exclaimed the lad in the carriage, and turning an astonished look upon his father.

"I know it, Ted; but the little vagabond was longing with all his heart to see the show—he wouldn't take the dime for recovering Gipsy's hat, so I had to make an occasion; see?" and Theodore Lawrence, Sr., smiled significantly into the face of his son,

who returned him a comprehensive nod and began to whistle softly to himself—a habit of his when specially pleased over anything.

Miss Gipsy—more decorously christened Margaret Churchill Lawrence—reached forth a plump hand and fondly patted the stalwart shoulders in front of her, and lovingly cooed “*dear Popsy!*” thus expressing her appreciation of her father’s tactful kindness.

It was noticeable that on this same plump hand there gleamed a very pretty turquoise ring which the happy child regarded with affectionate complacency during the operation; then lifting her eyes to her mother she continued, with a sigh of supreme content:

“Isn’t it just the *sweet-est* ring, mamma? Such a lovely birthday gift, and just what I wanted.”

Mr. Lawrence drove to a hitching rail inside the grounds, where, after assisting his family to alight, he fastened and unchecked his horses. Then, turning to his protégé, who was close at hand, he inquired:

“Do you know anything about horses, my boy?”

“Yes, sir; I’ve helped take care of them at the farm.”

“What farm?”

“The—er—the farm where I’ve lived.” The lad’s face grew suddenly scarlet as he faltered over his reply, and to conceal his embarrassment he bent to brush a wisp of hay from the foreleg of the off horse.

"What is your name?" pursued Mr. Lawrence.

"Louis Arnold, sir."

"Well, Louis, you can watch around to see that no one meddles with the team while we take a look at the exhibits in the hall; then you shall have an opportunity to see the sights," and with this, Mr. Lawrence and his family went their way, leaving the young stranger in charge of his valuable team.

Evidently the boy was very fond of horses, for he at once became absorbed in a critical inspection of the beautiful span committed to his care.

"My! but you are a dandy pair of beauties!" he exclaimed admiringly and with shining eyes, as he walked slowly around them, patting their sleek haunches, smoothing their glossy manes, slapping, here and there, at a tantalizing fly, and confidentially keeping up his flattering commendations, as if he were talking to intelligent companions who could understand and appreciate every word he uttered.

Half an hour later, while he was still faithfully watching at his post, Ted Lawrence suddenly reappeared upon the scene.

"Hello!" he observed by way of salutation as he bestowed a friendly nod upon the boy.

"Hello!" echoed Louis, while his observing eyes took a comprehensive sweep over the trim figure of the rich man's son.

"You can take a run around the grounds, if you want to, and I'll stay with the team till you come back," continued Ted genially.

Louis flushed with pleasure, and his eyes lighted

with eagerness for an instant. Then he quietly replied:

"Guess I won't."

"Why?"

"'Cause."

"That doesn't mean anything; it's a girl's reason," observed Ted, with slightly scornful emphasis. "I thought, by the way you were sticking to that knot-hole awhile ago, you were just dying to see the show."

"That's right—I was," briefly responded Louis, as he deftly rearranged the displaced forelock of the horse nearest him.

"Then why don't you take your chance when it's offered you?" demanded Ted.

"Your father left me here to look after these black beauties till he came back."

"But don't you suppose I could do that just as well as you?" queried Ted, with an undertone of asperity in his voice.

"Course I do," assented the youthful hostler, *pro tem.*, with convincing emphasis, "but—that wasn't in the bargain, you know."

"Oh!" ejaculated the elder boy, looking enlightened, but bestowing a glance of surprise upon the stranger, as if he had not expected such a point of honor from him.

Then, as his eyes fell upon Louis' bruised and caloused feet, he inquired irrelevantly:

"How'd you get knocked up like that?"

"Frogging it down the mountains."

"Where from?"

"From—the farm."

"Your father's farm?"

"No. I haven't any father," said the boy stoically, as he toyed with a buckle and strap of the harness.

"Nor mother either?" pursued Ted, with a noticeable softening of his curious tone as he viewed the rags and patches on the boy's clothing.

Louis slowly shook his head without replying; but the sudden contraction of his brow and suspicious quivering of his round chin betrayed that a very tender spot had been touched by the question.

Ted felt a choking lump rising in his own throat as he observed these signs of conscious bereavement. It must be mighty hard for a fellow to get along without his father and mother—especially his mother—he thought sympathetically.

"You ought to have a stout pair of shoes before you go back," he hastened to remark, to get away from the harrowing topic, meanwhile making a mental inventory of a plentiful supply of foot-gear that was stored away in his closet at home.

"I'm not going back," was the brief rejoinder.

Ted eyed him curiously for a moment, then pursed up his lips and gave vent to a softly prolonged whistle.

"I'll bet you're a—*runaway!*" he impulsively exclaimed.

A vivid scarlet suffused his companion's face, and a startled look shot into his great brown eyes as he

glanced tearfully around to assure himself that no one had overheard the observation.

Then he retorted, with a sudden burst of temper:

"S'pose I am! It—it isn't anybody's business."

Ted exhibited signs of discomfiture at this unexpected shot. He had not meant to give offense, having spoken upon the impulse of the moment. Presently he said, in a conciliatory tone:

"You needn't fire up like that. I wouldn't give you away even if I *knew* you were. I couldn't be hard on a fellow who is down in his luck, you know."

The hot color faded out of Louis' face as quickly as it had come, and with a somewhat crestfallen air he apologetically observed:

"All right—I guess you're O. K.; but—do you believe in 'luck'?" Evidently he wished to change the subject.

"Yes; don't you?"

"No; there isn't any such thing."

"I say—you're a queer kind of chap," Ted gravely remarked; then drawing nearer the boy and regarding him with curious interest he added: "I should think *I* was having mighty hard luck if I were in your place. What do *you* call it?"

"Don't you believe in—God?" Louis inquired, with apparent irrelevance.

Now Ted was a prominent choir-boy in a fashionable Episcopalian church, where his parents were regular attendants, and he had been reared to devoutly espouse its creed, forms and ceremonies;

therefore he replied, with emphatic assurance, not unmixed, however, with perplexity:

“Of course I believe in God.”

“Well, then, what is He and where is He?”

Ted's eyes grew big and his wonder increased.

“Why,” he returned, after thinking a moment, “God is—is *all*, and He is everywhere, don't you know?”

“Then where does your ‘luck’ come in?” soberly demanded Louis.

“Well!—that beats me! You *are* the queerest fellow I ever saw!” Ted ejaculated, with a laugh of mingled amusement and embarrassment, as he saw the point; and just at that moment Mr. Lawrence, accompanied by his wife and daughter, appeared upon the scene, thus putting an end to the discussion of the youthful theologians.

CHAPTER II

"Ah, Ted, we were wondering what had become of you," his father remarked, as he drew near the boys. "Evidently you were not specially interested in fruits, flowers, vegetables, and the handicraft of ladies."

"No, sir; I didn't care much for the things in the hall, so thought I'd come and stay with the team and give Louis a chance to look around, but he said that wasn't in the bargain and he wouldn't go till you came back; so we've been having a talk," Ted explained.

Mr. Lawrence bent a searching look upon the young stranger. What his son had told him greatly impressed him in his favor, while, as he studied his fine face and noted his sedate, respectful manner, he felt that, under right conditions, he would be likely to develop into a man who would honor whatever calling he might choose.

"I wonder who the little ragamuffin is," he mused, as he drew a handful of silver from a pocket, and selecting the promised "quarter" therefrom, passed it to the boy.

"Here is your money, young man, and I like the way you stick to a bargain," he said, with an approving smile. "Now go and have a good time, and

if you love horses, as I think you do, you will see some fine specimens on the track pretty soon."

Louis doffed his battered hat and thanked his kind patron with a beaming face as his brown fingers closed eagerly over the precious piece of silver which he had earned, and which seemed almost a mine of wealth to his unaccustomed eyes.

He was on the point of bounding off to seek some vantage point from which to view the racing, when Miss Gipsy approached him and bashfully tendered a sizable and well-filled paper bag.

"Do you like candy?" she shyly inquired. "I bought this for you."

The lad crimsoned to the tips of his ears as with a diffident "Thank you!" he doffed his hat again and accepted her gift; then he slipped away and was quickly lost among the crowd.

"Well, there goes an interesting enigma which I would like the privilege of studying for awhile," Mr. Lawrence remarked, as he assisted his wife into the carriage, then lightly swung his daughter in beside her.

"Humph! he's got wheels in his upper story," Ted asserted, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he sprang to his own place on the front seat with his father.

"Wheels!" repeated Mr. Lawrence. "What do you mean by that?"

Ted gravely rehearsed the recent conversation with his new acquaintance. It appeared to have left a deep impression on his mind.

"Turned preacher, did he? and doesn't believe in luck," said the gentleman, with an amused laugh, when he concluded. "Well, I devoutly hope his radical ideas on that point will not interfere with the success of our trotter, Ben Bolt, when he takes his turn on the track this afternoon."

"Oh, he ought to be our mascot instead, papa, because you were so good to him," his daughter here interposed.

"It is pretty evident what your attitude is regarding the question under discussion," her father observed, as his twinkling eyes met those of his wife.

"I don't know what you mean, popsy," said the child, looking puzzled.

A general laugh followed her remark.

"What do you know about mascots, pet?" questioned Mr. Lawrence in a mirthful tone.

"Why, I've heard you talk about mascots lots of times, and of course I know you mean they are things that bring you good luck; *so now!*" and the emphasis upon the last two words plainly indicated that the "pet" of the family had not quite relished the laugh at her expense.

"Well, you have vindicated yourself, sweetheart—you are developing every day," the man fondly returned. "However, our youthful tramp has raised quite a point and is a queer problem. He behaves like a little gentleman, betrays a very nice sense of honor, gives us a theological discourse in a nutshell, yet looks like a veritable beggar just out of the slums.

"I really would like to know his history," he thoughtfully concluded.

Later they caught sight of him standing by the judges' pavilion, one arm thrown around a post that supported it, his flushed, eager face betraying keenest interest and enjoyment as he watched the flying steeds upon the race-course.

They looked for him again when all was over, and they were slowly driving off the grounds; but he was nowhere to be seen, and each experienced a sense of disappointment, for the interesting though unfortunate boy had appealed strongly to the sympathies of the entire family, while Mr. Lawrence had been seriously considering a plan to help him in some practical way.

They had covered only a short distance of their homeward way when Gipsy suddenly sent forth a most plaintive wail.

"Oh, mamma! I have lost my lovely ring, and my—my birthday is spoiled!" she cried; and the startling announcement ended with a heartbroken burst of tears and sobs.

"Your birthday ring, dearie? It *was* a little large for you. But don't worry—I can't think it is lost; it must be somewhere in the carriage," said her mother reassuringly, while Ted immediately began a vigorous search for the missing treasure among the mats on the floor, Gipsy assisting him as well as she was able, with the crystal drops raining from her pretty eyes.

But the ring, with its daintily set turquoise stones,

which her father had slipped upon her finger that morning in honor of her tenth birthday, was not to be found, even though, after reaching home, they all diligently sought it and both robes and rugs were thoroughly shaken.

The child was inconsolable. A pretty ring had been a long-coveted possession, and to lose it on the very day it was given her seemed a terrible affliction. Mr. Lawrence, however, finally aroused a faint hope of its recovery by promising to have her loss advertised in the daily paper of the town.

While Louis Arnold was standing by the judges' pavilion, wholly unconscious of his surroundings, or of aught save the sport in which he had become completely absorbed, a carriage containing a gentleman and lady came slowly along the drive and paused, almost opposite the spot where he was stationed, to allow another team to pass.

"Look at that boy!" exclaimed the lady, calling the attention of her companion to the animated face and tensely poised figure by the post.

The man gave a short laugh as his glance fell upon the forlorn little waif, and then something prompted him to lean out of the carriage to observe the lad more closely.

At that instant Louis turned and looked straight at the couple in the vehicle. The laugh had attracted his attention.

"By George!" suddenly ejaculated the gentleman, with a violent start, as he met the great brown eyes upraised to his, while instantly the ruddy color

in his face faded to a sickly hue. "Get up!" he added sharply to his horse, and driving on.

"Why, what is the matter?" inquired his companion, regarding him with evident surprise.

"Oh, nothing," was the would-be indifferent rejoinder. "It struck me that the youngster was a somewhat incongruous element—an unsightly blot thrust upon this festive scene—that's all." But he did not immediately regain his color or composure.

The lady sighed softly as they passed on, and at length stopped before the grand stand, where she alighted and was conducted to a reserved seat, while her husband went to put up his team before rejoining her. A few minutes later he might have been seen in close proximity to the "incongruous element—the unsightly blot," studying his brown face with lynx-eyed scrutiny.

"Have some peanuts?" he queried in an off-hand tone, as he passed Louis a bag from which, apparently, he had been eating as he approached the spot.

"Thank you, sir," said the boy, as he took a modest handful, and thought how good everybody had been to him that day.

"What's your name, youngster?" pursued the newcomer, after watching him closely but covertly for awhile. He was a man upwards of fifty years, above the average height, stout of figure, florid in complexion, assured in his bearing, and possessed a rather attractive though shrewd face and keen, restless gray eyes. He was well dressed, wore a small but flawless diamond in his necktie, and gave one

the impression of being in most prosperous circumstances.

"Louis Arnold, sir," said the boy, in reply to his inquiry.

"You look like some one I once knew. What was your mother's name before she married your father?" the stranger continued, but his lips were not quite steady as he put the question.

"Annie Judkins, sir."

The man drew a quick breath, and again the ruddy color was swept out of his face.

"I—I used to know some one by the name of—Judkins; but that was before I left England," he remarked, with some hesitation.

"My mother lived in England once. Do you think you ever knew *her*?" eagerly questioned Louis.

The man grew paler than before.

"No; the person I refer to was a—man," was the somewhat hasty reply. "Where do you live?" he demanded after a moment.

"I haven't any home now. I've been living up in —, but I'm trying to get a place as chore-boy," Louis explained, adding, with an eager thrill in his young voice: "Do you know of anybody who wants one?"

"I don't think I do," returned the man, now flushing hotly. Then he queried sharply: "Have you no father or mother?"

"No, nor anybody to take care of me," was the pathetic rejoinder.

Again the man caught his breath and shot a look of dismay upon the forlorn figure beside him.

"Have some more peanuts," he said, after an awkward pause. "Take them all—I do not care for any more."

He thrust the bag into Louis' hand, hesitated an instant, as if about to make some further remark, then turned abruptly away and walked toward the grand stand; but there was a strained expression in his eyes, and he moved like a person dazed by some terrifying shock or unlooked-for revelation.

Two weeks later Benjamin Weston, a well-to-do farmer, who resided on the outskirts of one of Boston's beautiful suburban towns, was returning home late one afternoon from his customary visit to the post-office, when he came suddenly upon a boy stretched prone upon the ground by the roadside, not more than a stone's throw from his own door.

"Well, youngster, it seems to me that you have chosen a pretty hard bed. Why are lying here at this time of the day?" he questioned, as the lad wearily lifted his head at the sound of steps, and bent a wistful look upon the man.

"I'm just resting," briefly returned the wayfarer, as, with a sigh, he dropped back to his former position.

"Resting! What have you been doing to make you give out like this on the road?" demanded the farmer.

"Tramping."

"Tramping! You look rather young to be in that kind of business. Where do you come from?"

"New Hampshire."

"H'm! That *is* quite a walk for a boy of your size, sure enough. Been on the way long?"

"'Most three weeks."

"Where are you bound for?"

"I don't know, sir; I've been trying to hire out all the way down, but nobody wants——"

The youth choked suddenly, and turned his face away from the keen eyes that were thoughtfully studying him.

"H'm!" again ejaculated the man, bending a glance of compassion upon the forlorn figure lying at his feet. "You look to me as if you'd been tramping on an empty stomach, at least for to-day. Suppose you come home with me and fill up before you go on."

Louis Arnold—for the youthful wanderer was none other than Mr. Lawrence's interesting protégé at the recent county fair in New Hampshire—started to his elbow, an intensely yearning expression in his large brown eyes as he pathetically returned:

"You are very good, sir, and I—I am hungry." But he flushed with shame as he reluctantly admitted the fact.

"Well, well, boy; then come on. There's always a bite in mother's pantry for hungry folks, and maybe we can find you a more comfortable place to rest your tired body in for the night," said the farmer, with a sympathetic inflection that went straight to

Louis' heart, putting new life in him, and bringing him to his feet almost before the man ceased speaking.

But he looked pale and gaunt from long fasting and the many other trying experiences of the last two weeks. His eyes were heavy and sunken from excessive weariness, and his clothing was even more soiled, tattered, and worn than when we last saw him.

It was but a few steps to the farmhouse, and as they drew near the porch outside the kitchen a fine collie sprang up with a quick, sharp bark of warning.

"It's all right, Ponce," said his master reassuringly, whereupon the intelligent creature walked deliberately up to Louis, looked gravely into his face for a moment, then wagged his feathery tail in hospitable welcome.

Directing his guest to sit down on the porch for a moment, Mr. Weston disappeared within the house, and the boy dropped wearily upon the steps, feeling as if he never wanted to move again.

A little later a cheery, motherly woman came out to him, and Louis loved her from the instant that she smiled kindly into his tired eyes.

"I'm told there's a hungry boy out here," she observed in pleasant, sprightly tones. "What's his name, I wonder?"

"Louis Arnold, marm."

"Well, Louis, come in with me and we'll see if we can't make that aching void a dream of the past,"

she said, with a little rippling laugh that immediately made his heavy heart grow lighter.

He followed her inside the immaculate kitchen, where he saw one end of a table laid with a white cloth and spread with a bountiful supply of cold meat, bread and butter, a glass of milk, and a generous piece of freshly baked apple pie.

"Sit right down, my boy, and help yourself. It is a little early for our supper, but I could not keep you waiting," Mrs. Weston cordially enjoined, while she studied, without appearing to do so, the tired face of her youthful visitor.

Louis hesitated, and appeared embarrassed.

"Please—may I wash my hands first?" he queried diffidently.

"Of course you may. Why didn't I think of that myself?" and the good woman whisked a shining basin from its hook above the sink, brought him soap and a clean towel, then made an errand from the room to relieve him of the awkwardness of performing his ablutions in her presence.

He gave his face and hands a thorough wash, then, drawing a small comb from a pocket, arranged his tumbled locks in a tidy manner, after which he sat down to the first really ample and wholesome meal that he had eaten for many a long day; and it was a delectable feast to the half-starved boy.

He was left alone for half an hour, when Mrs. Weston, followed by her husband, returned to the kitchen to find him fast asleep in his chair, the collie sitting close beside him, his beautiful head resting

upon the boy's knee. Evidently the two had lost no time in becoming good friends.

Louis awakened and started up in confusion as the door opened, and Mrs. Weston's face wore a very compassionate expression as she remarked:

"I know somebody who would be glad to tumble into bed this very minute, and there's just the place for him in a little room over the wood-shed. You'll need a good bath first, so father'll take up a pail of water for you and show you the way; and"—laying a folded garment on the table—"here's a clean night-gown for you. Now, good night, and you are to have your breakfast here in the morning."

She began clearing the table as she concluded, while Louis, with a tremulous "Thank you, marm," followed the farmer from the room.

His bath refreshed and rested him. It was a luxury he had not enjoyed since he started out on his long tramp, while the spotless night-gown and clean bed—what a treat they were!

He slept as only a tired-out boy can sleep, and was awakened at dawn by the crowing of a deep-voiced Brahma cock that, coming forth betimes, proudly proclaimed the fact beneath his chamber window.

Slipping out of bed, Louis was quickly dressed, then drawing from the deep inside pocket of his shabby jacket a small black-covered book, and taking it to the window, he read a couple of pages from it, after which he covered his eyes with his hand, and bowed his head for a few moments in a reverent attitude.

When these simple devotions were over he stole noiselessly from his room and the house, curious to take a look at his surroundings and the abode that had sheltered him for the night, and which he had been too weary to observe when the farmer took him in.

The Weston homestead, a comfortable, roomy mansion, was beautifully located upon an extensive lawn which sloped gently toward the road and was bordered by a row of noble old elms. Back of this there were a spacious barn, carriage house, and other out-buildings, while on every hand there was an air of orderliness, stability and thrift which indicated not only an abundance of means, but good management, and a desire for attractive surroundings as well.

Louis' eyes turned wistfully toward the barn, for he dearly loved all animals, and he had already taken a few steps in that direction when he caught sight of a great wood-pile, with a chopping-block beside it, in the back-yard opposite the kitchen door.

He paused, thought a moment, then went back into the shed, whence he presently emerged again with a hatchet in hand, and the next minute was vigorously at work reducing such sticks of wood as he could conveniently handle to available fuel.

Thus Farmer Weston found him when, a little later, he came forth from the house with several shining pails in his hands to attend to the morning milking.

"Good morning, Louis," he called out in a hearty

tone, and with an approving glance at the deftly wielded hatchet. "I guess you've taken a hand at that kind of work before."

"Yes, sir; I had to chop wood every day at the farm."

"Whose farm?"

"Er—the—the poor-farm, where I've been living," replied the boy, with scarlet cheeks, but evidently determined to tell the truth about himself to his new friend.

"H'm—a poor-farm up in New Hampshire?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't like it up there?"

Louis shook his head emphatically while he dealt an especially energetic blow upon the knotty stick in process of dissection.

"So you ran away to seek your fortune in Massachusetts?" observed Mr. Preston in a quizzical tone. "Weren't they good to you up there?"

"I didn't mind their rough ways so much; but if a fellow is willing to work for his living he isn't going to stand being cursed as 'a beggar' and 'a pauper,'" returned the boy, with blazing eyes.

Mr. Weston nodded approvingly, as if he sympathized with and commended this burst of spirit. Then he inquired irrelevantly:

"Do you like to chop wood?"

"No, sir," with a positive inflection which left no doubt regarding the matter.

"What makes you do it, then?"

Louis lifted an earnest look to the man's face.

"Suppose I don't *like* to do it? You've been good to me, and I wanted to do something for you," he responded, with a heartiness that proved his sincerity.

"That's right," and the farmer's tone expressed much. Then he added: "Do you know how to milk?"

"I can do pretty well, sir."

"Then suppose you come to the barn and help me? My man is away for a few days. How would you like to stay here and work for me till he comes back?"

"Oh, *may* I?" cried Louis joyfully. "I'd just love to, and I'll do the very best I can."

With a glowing face and an energy born of a suddenly lightened heart, he swung his hatchet deep into the chopping-block, and followed his companion to the barn with an alert step and care-free air which bespoke an eagerness to make good his word "to do his best," and a mind at rest regarding his present necessities.

CHAPTER III

LOUIS ARNOLD believed himself the happiest boy in Massachusetts that day, and could not seem to do enough to manifest his joy and attest his gratitude for the kindness shown him by the good farmer and his wife. He helped with the milking and drove the cows to pasture before breakfast, Ponce, the collie, who, strangely enough, having apparently conceived a strong and sudden affection for him, keeping close at his heels most of the time.

After the morning meal, which was served him in the kitchen by Hannah, the maid, who also appeared to participate in the good-will of the entire family toward him, there were many things to be done, and he showed himself so interested in his work, so eager to please, and was so uniformly respectful and well-behaved that Farmer Weston was more and more attracted to him, and began to feel a growing curiosity regarding his antecedents and the adverse circumstances that had combined to reduce so bright and well-bred a boy to the pitiable condition of a helpless dependant upon the doubtful charity of a New Hampshire poor-farm.

When the noon dinner was over he told him to take an hour's rest, or amuse himself in any way he chose before they began upon their afternoon's work, which was to be in the potato field.

"Or, perhaps," he observed, as he seated himself on the back porch to smoke his after-dinner pipe, "you'd like to tell me something about yourself, and how you happen to be in such a plight. Haven't you any relatives, my boy?"

"No, sir," replied Louis, as he dropped upon a step near him, while the sociable collie stretched himself on the ground at his feet. "My father died when I was eight years old, and my mother"—with a pathetic quiver of his round chin—"when I was ten."

"And wasn't there an aunt, uncle, or a cousin who could take you in?" kindly inquired Mr. Weston.

"No, sir. My father was the high-school teacher in our town, and we had everything nice while he lived, and after he went away my mother took in dressmaking until she got too sick to work. But they didn't have anybody belonging to them like most folks."

"That seems strange—to have no relatives," said the farmer thoughtfully. "Was your mother sick long?"

"Well, not really sick; but she kept getting thinner and whiter for a long time, till one day she dropped down in a faint and never came to."

The boy turned away his face at this point, dropped his head, and was silent for a moment or two, whereupon Ponce got up and sympathetically poked his cold nose into his hand. Thus reminded of his presence and friendly interest, Louis slipped

an appreciative arm around his neck, and gave him an affectionate hug, then resumed:

"We didn't have any money at all, so there had to be an auction of all our things and to—to take care of her, you know. Then, as there wasn't anybody to look after me, the selectmen said I'd have to go to the town farm. But Aunt Martha—her name is Miss Martha Wellington—wouldn't let me."

"How does she happen to be Aunt Martha to you?" Mr. Weston here interposed.

"Oh, she was very good to my mother and me after my father went away. She used to stay with us a lot, to help mother do the work and sew, and she was there when—when—that last day, and—until after the auction." Louis had to stop here again and swallow hard two or three times before he could go on.

"When the selectmen said I'd have to go to the town farm," he presently continued, "she told them I shouldn't; she said she had little enough to live on herself, but she'd try to make it do and take care of me, too, until somebody, who could do better by me, would give me a home."

"H'm! She was a friend worth having," said Mr. Weston, with hearty appreciation.

"I *guess* she was," returned the boy with positive emphasis; "so I've lived with her 'most ever since, and I never loved anybody, except mother, as I love her. She thought a lot of me, too, and so she had me call her 'Aunt Martha.'"

An irrepressible sob burst from the lad just here,

showing how keenly he still felt his bereavement of both mother and friend. Hot tears also forced their way into his eyes, but he winked hard to prevent them from rolling over his cheeks, and bit his lips in the effort to regain his self-control.

“And did she——?”

“Oh, no,” Louis quickly interposed, as if to prevent the utterance of a word that hurt him, “but her sister, out in Colorado, did, and she was sent for to go and take care of her family. We—we both thought we couldn’t bear it at first, and she said she’d take me with her if she could afford it; but there were four children out there, and they were poor, too, so she just *had* to leave me behind.”

Once more the boy broke off suddenly, and throwing his other arm around Ponce’s neck drew him closer to him, while Mr. Weston, with a suspicious quiver of his own eyelids, removed his pipe from his mouth, shook the ashes from it, and quietly laid it aside.

“Then,” the lad went on, but keeping his face turned away from his companion’s gaze, “as there wasn’t anybody else in the town who could have me, I *had* to go to the farm. But”—straightening himself proudly and flushing hotly—“I only lived there four weeks. *I just wouldn’t stay.* They made me work all the time. I didn’t mind that—I like to work,” he hastened to explain; “but I did mind being cuffed and sworn at and twitted with being ‘a pauper not worth my salt.’ I’m only a boy, I know, but I’m sure I earned more than it cost to

keep me, and I wouldn't be called such names and be made to feel I was a burden on the town, so—I ran away," he concluded, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"And they didn't clothe you any too well, either," observed Mr. Weston, as his glance swept the forlorn-looking figure before him.

Louis flushed and shrank sensitively.

"I had some better clothes and some good shoes and stockings when I started—Aunt Martha bought them for me just before she went West. I made them up in a bundle, to save them, wore my old ones, and went barefoot; but I fell asleep by the roadside, one afternoon, and when I woke up they were gone—somebody had stolen them."

"That was hard lines," said the farmer in a tone of sympathy. Then he added cheerily: "But mother's going to look up some things for you before the day is out. We had a boy here last year who was about your size, and he left some very good clothes which he had outgrown; I guess they'll come pretty near being a fit for you."

"Thank you, sir. I'd like them, if you'll let me work long enough to pay for them," said Louis, flushing with mingled pleasure and independence.

"I imagine we can fix that all right," his companion returned, with a quiet smile. Then after a moment of silence he gravely remarked: "The Lord has laid His hand heavily upon you, my boy, in depriving you of your parents and friends so early in life, and leaving you to shift for yourself."

Louis now turned square around and bent a look of astonishment upon the man.

"God didn't do that," he asserted positively.

The farmer looked surprised in turn, and moved uneasily in his chair.

"Ahem! What makes you think so?" he questioned seriously.

"Why, because God is *good*."

"Of course; but don't you believe that God gives life?"

"Yes, sir."

"And takes it away?"

"Oh, no, sir; He couldn't do that."

"Tut! tut! What's that?" demanded Mr. Weston, a note of sternness in his tones, and sitting suddenly erect. "Why not?"

"Because God *is life* and He is *everywhere*; so He couldn't kill life anywhere without killing a part of Himself," said Louis, with quiet assurance and amazing philosophy.

The farmer's face was a study as he listened to this metaphysical statement regarding Deity, while he stared at his youthful guest with an air of perplexity which plainly indicated that he considered him a queer problem.

"Humph! Rather remarkable logic for one of your years! So that's the kind of theology your Aunt Martha has been teaching you?" he remarked, with a suggestive shrug of his broad shoulders.

"I don't know whether it's theology or not; but I know it's truth," returned the boy conclusively.

"Where do you find it?"

"In the Bible, of course."

"H'm!" ejaculated the man reflectively. "Then you don't believe that God deprived you of your mother and put you in the poor-house?"

"No, *sir*; if I did I—I should—*hate* Him," passionately exclaimed the lad, with a spasmodic catch in his breath.

At this, Farmer Weston flushed up suddenly and a steel-like glitter leaped into his usually kind eyes.

A few years previous he had lost his only son—the pride of his life, the hope of his future, and while he would hardly have dared to say that he hated God—because, with his rigid adherence to established Presbyterian doctrines, he believed that "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord"—he had nevertheless been secretly and bitterly rebellious against being thus bereft, and that bitterness still rankled in his heart.

"Who is responsible, then?" he curtly demanded.

"Sin—evil. Aunt Martha says——" Louis began, then paused abruptly.

"Well, what does Aunt Martha say?" sharply queried his companion, a vivid spot of red still burning on either cheek and showing how deeply the man had been stirred.

"She says God is *all good*, so He can't send anything but good to anyone. She says *we* are to blame for all the evil in the world, for if all the people who have ever lived had never thought any but good thoughts they would never have known anything

about evil and the trouble it brings," and Louis' earnest face and assured tone indicated that he was firmly convinced of the truth of the arguments he had quoted.

"How I wish I could know this dear Aunt Martha. She has certainly taught you a beautiful and practical faith," a gentle voice here interposed; and turning, with a start of surprise, Louis saw, standing in the doorway behind him, a graceful figure, daintily clad in white, and found himself looking into a face which, excepting his mother's, he thought was the loveliest he had ever seen.

The lady was perhaps thirty-five years of age, with a dignified yet gracious bearing, shining nut-brown hair and beautiful blue eyes—darkly blue, like the fringed gentian that grew abundantly near his old home, and which he dearly loved; and there was a delicate tinge of color in her cheeks that was like the faint afterglow on fleecy clouds at sunset.

"Ah, Helen, come out; this is just what will interest you," said Mr. Weston, a genial smile instantly chasing the cloud from his brow, as he turned to the newcomer. Then he added: "Louis, this lady is my daughter, Mrs. Richards, who is visiting us for awhile."

Louis was on his feet in an instant and doffed his shabby hat with an innate grace and courtesy which proclaimed him both well-born and well-bred.

"So you are Louis Arnold," Mrs. Richards observed, as she smiled pleasantly into his admiring eyes. "My father tells me you are to remain with

us for a few days. I hope you will get nicely rested and be happy with us."

"We've been having a discussion similar to those you and I have had of late," the farmer resumed. "It seems that Aunt Martha, to whom you heard him refer, is a veritable oracle upon the puzzling question of good and evil and God's providence," he concluded, a quizzical smile curling his lips and gleaming in his eyes.

Louis grew suddenly crimson.

"I don't know what you mean by 'oracle'; but I can tell you she is almost the best woman that ever lived," he retorted, with something very like a resentful thrill in his voice.

"I'm inclined to agree with you, my boy," kindly responded Mr. Weston, who saw that the lad was hurt. "Oracle means a wise person; so you see I was simply paying a tribute to your friend. I am sure Miss Wellington must be a most estimable lady, and, as Mrs. Richards had said, I would like to know her."

"I see that you and Ponce have become good friends," Mrs. Richards now remarked, to change the subject, and she smiled as she saw the collie creep close to him again and poke his inquisitive nose into the crown of the shabby hat that hung by his side.

"I love dogs—fine dogs," Louis replied, as he affectionately patted the glossy head of the animal, who pricked up his ears and wagged his plummy tail, as if in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"That is a fine dog," asserted Farmer Weston. "He's a good judge of human nature, too, and doesn't make friends with everybody. He isn't backward in tricks, either; see here, Ponce."

The man reached for a ball that lay on a window-sill near him, and, leaning off the porch, tossed it high in the air.

The dog was on the alert in an instant, eager for the sport, but quick as he was Louis was quicker, and, darting out into the yard, sprang aloft, catching the descending ball in his brown hands with a shout of boyish triumph, whereupon Ponce gave a quick, sharp bark of mingled appeal and disappointment, and stood upright on his hind legs, begging for the prize.

"Want it?" said Louis, holding it just beyond his reach with a tantalizing air.

Ponce whined wistfully.

"Here goes, then," cried the youth, when there followed a romp which, for boyish and canine characteristics and startling athletic feats, was a marvel and a delight to the appreciative group upon the piazza.

The farmer roared with mirth and keenest enjoyment.

Helen Richards clapped her jeweled hands with the abandon and enthusiasm of a girl, while staid Mrs. Weston and Hannah, the maid, left their work in the kitchen and came to the door to get their share of the fun.

Ponce won at the end of the game from a gener-

ous opponent, who, with one last vigorous toss of the ball, cried out:

"Now, Ponce, here you are; go for it; hi, there!" and the eager collie, measuring distances with his keen eyes, bounded forward, poised himself beneath the descending trophy, then, with an agile spring, caught it between his jaws, and, running back to Louis, deposited it at his feet and begged for another round.

"No, sir; that's enough for this time," laughed the panting lad, as he sank upon the porch and fanned himself with his shabby hat.

"I guess there's some boy left in you after all, although I was beginning to think Aunt Martha had ordained you pretty early in life," Mr. Weston dryly remarked, but with a quiet twinkle in his eyes. "Well"—glancing at his watch and rising from his chair—"it's about time we made tracks for the potato field—ever dug potatoes, Louis?"

"Lot o' times," replied Louis, springing nimbly to his feet, apparently as eager for work as he had been for play.

"All right; you'll find a couple of hoes in the shed, and I'll get the basket."

Louis darted away to bring the required implements, and Mrs. Richards, looking thoughtfully after him, remarked to her remaining companion:

"Father, I believe that is no ordinary boy, and I wish he might find a good home with the right kind of people."

"So do I, Helen—so do I. I don't like to think

of him all alone in the world, left to the influence and mercy of whoever he may chance to meet," gravely responded the man as he moved away to go for his basket.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. RICHARDS was the only remaining child of four that had once comprised the family of Farmer Weston and his good wife, who were energetic, prosperous people, broad-minded, progressive, and most highly esteemed in the town where they had lived ever since their wedding day, when they had proudly taken possession of the tiny cottage which later had become the "L" to the handsome and commodious farmhouse which was now their home.

Helen Weston, from her childhood, had been a favorite in the community with both old and young. Possessing an amiable disposition, an attractive personality, together with a vein of irresistible humor, besides being a fine scholar, she had been regarded not only as the flower of the family, but of the village as well.

After graduating from the high school of her native place she had taken a four years' course at Wellesley College, preparatory to teaching, and having won her degree, she secured a fine position in a select school in Chicago, where, after a couple of years, she met and married a prosperous lawyer, William Richards, who had already attained an enviable reputation in that mighty city of the Middle West.

Having always maintained a high moral stand-

ard, never lending himself to a case which he could not contest with an absolutely clear conscience, he had won the unlimited confidence of his clients, his progress had been relatively rapid, and now, at thirty-seven years of age, he was rated as one of the leading men in his profession, and financially successful in proportion.

No children came to the young couple, and there were times when Helen Richards was lonely, even amid her luxurious surroundings, and yearned intensely for her dear ones at home.

Frequent visits were exchanged, however, Mr. and Mrs. Weston from time to time spending the entire winter with their daughter, while every summer found the Richardses abandoning themselves to the freedom of country life at the old homestead in Massachusetts.

Mrs. Richards had several times proposed to her father that he sell his farm and make a permanent home with her; but Mr. Weston affirmed that as long as he was hale and hearty he could never tear himself away from his native soil or give up his long-accustomed duties; while, too, he said the bustling, hurrying West was too rapid for him, and he preferred the quiet routine of his more methodical life.

Out in the potato field that bright afternoon, after their interesting noon hour on the porch, the observing farmer found that Louis could hoe as vigorously and to as good purpose as he had done everything else that day. He proved himself very companion-

able, also, and as something of his shyness wore off he talked cheerily and freely with his new friend, who became more and more convinced that Aunt Martha was a remarkable woman, and had sown good seed in a fruitful soil. Evidently she was a woman of culture, notwithstanding her humble position in life—a woman of rigid honesty and unswerving principle in every respect; for the boy's language was unusually correct and well chosen for one of his years; while, from an ethical viewpoint, he seemed to possess the ideals of a lofty and acutely discriminating nature.

Yet he did not pose as a prodigy. He was refreshingly unconscious of self, spontaneous in his actions and expressions, and frequently bubbled over with genuine boyish spirits, not unmingled with a spice of mischief.

Man and boy worked harmoniously together until five o'clock, when it was time to begin on the chores for the night. When these were done and Louis, hungry as a young bear after his busy afternoon, appeared in the homelike kitchen, thoughtfully bearing an armful of wood for Hannah's box, Mrs. Weston, who was assisting in preparing the evening meal, greeted him with a cheery smile, and remarked:

"Well, Louis, if your work is all done you can go up to your room and put on some better clothes which you'll find there. Mrs. Richards and I are going to town, after supper, to do some errands. Would you like to come with us?"

"Yes'm," the boy replied, his face beaming with

pleasure in view of clean apparel as well as of the proposed outing.

He slipped away to the little chamber over the shed, where he found a suggestive pail of water, with soap and towels, awaiting him; also a neat brown suit of clothes, a clean shirt and blouse, with a pretty tie, which was but slightly defaced, even though it had evidently been worn. There were a pair of shoes and stockings also, both of which had seen service.

He was not long taking his bath and getting into his suit, which proved to be a very good fit, and he heaved a sigh of intense satisfaction to find himself neat and clean, and looking more like the trim boy who had never worn soiled or ragged garments until he was deprived of Aunt Martha's loving care.

The stockings, even though darned in various places, felt good to his feet, which had known no covering for many weeks. The shoes, however, were rather large; but he comforted himself with the philosophical reflection: "Better so than too tight, notwithstanding their clumsy proportions."

When he reappeared in the kitchen Mrs. Weston regarded him with a complacent smile, and was quick to observe the straight, white parting of his hair, and particularly the more presentable appearance of his finger-nails.

"He has been carefully reared," she said to herself. "Dear boy! He looks and behaves like a little gentleman, and my heart yearns over him in his friendlessness."

After supper the carriage was driven to the door,

whereupon Mrs. Weston appropriated the back seat, while Mrs. Richards and Louis occupied the one in front.

"Do you know how to drive, Louis?" inquired his companion, as her father passed the reins up to her.

"Yes'm"—eagerly.

"Would you like to act as our coachman this evening?"

"If you please"—lifting a bright look to her, and flushing with pleasure in view of her manifest confidence in his ability.

A silvery laugh rippled over the lady's lips as she put the lines in his hands.

"I thought I could not mistake that longing expression in those brown eyes, and I am sure you do know how to drive," she said, as she observed the way he laid hold upon the ribbons and drew his elbows close in to his sides preparatory to starting off.

It was less than half a mile to town—a lovely drive along a wide, well-graded road, lined with beautiful and stately trees, and flanked on either side with fine residences.

Upon reaching the village the horse was hitched in front of one of the large stores, whereupon the trio went from place to place to make their various purchases, Louis proving himself very useful as burden-bearer, while he thoroughly enjoyed himself in this capacity and kept his bright eyes busy, taking in his surroundings, nothing of interest being allowed to escape them.

The last errand concerned him personally and consisted in the purchase of a pair of good serviceable shoes to fit him; some underclothing and a suitable hat for fall wear. His flushed face was a study while his new friends were buying these things and there was a troubled expression in his eyes which did not escape Mrs. Richards' observation.

"How do you like it?" she inquired when, after trying on several, she at last found a hat that suited her better than others.

"I like it very much; but—" he began doubtfully, when she gently checked him by asking gravely:

"Louis, didn't Aunt Martha teach you who supplies all our needs?"

"Yes'm—God," with a comprehensive nod, yet with a suspicious quiver of his round chin.

"Then it is not for us to question, or allow our pride to make us feel burdened in view of the *way* He takes to provide for our wants," the lady pursued; "we are simply to be grateful and He will give the opportunity for a suitable expression of our gratitude. Now," she went on brightly, "we want a couple of new collars and a pretty necktie which are to be my own little offering, for I am going to ask a favor of you."

Louis lifted an eager face to her, thus plainly indicating how gladly he would grant anything she might ask; while as he met her smiling eyes his heart grew big and tender, just as it used to grow when, after he had done some special favor for her, Aunt Martha would throw her arm about his shoul-

ders and say: "I wonder what I should do without my little man of the house."

"I'm going to ask you to act as my escort to church to-morrow morning," the lady went on. "Mr. Richards is away on business and I'm not fond of going to church alone; would you like to go with me?"

"Yes'm, I would," replied Louis with a heartiness there was no mistaking.

"Thank you," was the gracious rejoinder that made it seem as if the weight of obligation was all on her side, "and we shall have to start very early, for I like to go by trolley into Boston at this time of the year."

"Boston!" repeated Louis in an indescribable tone, while his face shone with delight, for far-famed Boston had always seemed to him the Mecca of the universe.

"Yes; I judge you have never been there, so it will be an interesting trip for you, and I always attend church there when I come East. Now, I believe our purchases are all made and we will go home," she concluded as, having received her change, she turned to leave the store, and Louis, gathering up her bundles, followed her.

A very happy boy was early astir when morning broke again, and when Farmer Weston arose a little later than usual, as was his custom on the Sabbath, it was to find the stock all fed, most of the chores done and the milking well under way.

When this duty was finished Louis drove the cows to pasture, with Ponce again in close attendance and

manifesting in various ways his pleasure in the companionship of the stray waif who had so opportunely found a welcome under the hospitable roof of his master. When they returned they were walking side by side, Louis' hand resting affectionately upon the collie's silken head, while the lad was singing in a clear, boyish treble one of the many hymns that he and Aunt Martha had so loved to sing together in their dear little home among the New Hampshire hills.

Helen Richards, who was quietly reading in her own room, caught the familiar strains and paused to listen, a tender smile wreathing her lips.

"Dear child," she said softly, "I am so glad father favors the suggestion to keep him here. I shall go back to Chicago with a light heart, feeling that I have left a flood of sunshine to brighten the dear old home and that one of His 'little ones' is being well cared for."

After breakfast, Louis brought up the potatoes and other vegetables for dinner, filled both hods with coal for Hannah, then slipped away to prepare for the much anticipated trip to Boston.

He dressed with great care and flushed with pleasure upon taking a final survey of himself in the mirror; while his well-fitting shoes and "nobby" new hat appeared to afford him especial satisfaction. Then, obeying one of the tidy habits inculcated by Aunt Martha, he hung the clothing he had removed in his closet, in an orderly manner; but while so doing a wad of paper dropped to the floor from

one of the pockets of his jacket. Picking it up he unfolded it, revealing a paper bag which seemed to contain some substance within it.

"Aha!" he cried, and, slipping his fingers inside, he brought to light a chocolate cream, which, however, presented a decidedly mashed and battered appearance. He eyed it askance for a moment, then deliberately thrust it between his lips and munched it with as much relish, apparently, as if it had been fresh from the confectioner's establishment.

"Just one left," he mused as he turned his attention again to the bag. "Guess it might as well keep the other company—there are lots o' good things to eat here and I don't need to keep them for between meals now."

He was on the point of suiting the act to his words when he caught sight of a glittering object half embedded in the confection.

"By Jingo! where did that come from?" he exclaimed in great astonishment.

"That" was a small gold ring, set with pretty blue stones, and which had worked its way half out of sight into his last chocolate cream—all that remained of the bag of candy which Miss Gipsy, his little acquaintance of the county fair, had bought expressly for him.

The boy had treasured that gift most jealously, only now and then permitting himself the luxury of partaking of its contents, in order that he might retain some tangible reminder of that red-letter day

as long as possible. Nevertheless, now and then, when he had failed to get all that he needed to eat on his long tramps, he had been obliged to dip into it more frequently than he liked in order to appease the aching void in his hungry stomach.

His great brown eyes wore a very startled look just now as he viewed that small circlet, the loss of which had caused such heartbroken grief from Miss Gipsy and spoiled her otherwise happy birthday.

He was not long in arriving at correct conclusions, however, for he remembered having seen it gleaming on the pretty plump hand which she had reached out to receive the truant hat he had captured and returned to her.

Then a laugh of amusement broke from him as he realized that that same small hand must have dipped into his bag of sweets before it had been presented to him, when, doubtless, the ring had slipped from her finger and gradually worked its way to the bottom, where it had almost lost itself again in the very last of his sweetmeats.

He detached it and dropping it into his wash-basin carefully cleansed it, then wiped it dry on his towel, wondering all the while what he would do with it—how return it to its owner. He did not even know her name. He had heard her father address her as “Gipsy” and his son as “Ted,” but aside from these household pet names he had no clue whatever to the identity of the family.

But he was suddenly interrupted in these reflections by hearing the clock in the kitchen below strike

nine, and knew it was nearly time to start for church. He unbuttoned the front of his blouse and shirt, and brought to light a strong twine that encircled his neck and from which there hung suspended a broad plain band of gold.

It was his mother's wedding ring—taken from her hand by Aunt Martha and given to him to keep as a precious legacy. With compressed lips and fingers that were visibly tremulous, he untied the knot and slipped Gipsy's little birthday gift beside the other shining circlet, then retied the string and thrust his treasures out of sight, rebuttoned his clothing and went below to join Mrs. Richards who was awaiting him.

"How nice you look, Louis," she remarked as her eyes took a critical survey of him from head to foot. "I am sure Mr. Richards would be very happy this bright morning if he could know what a congenial companion I have to accompany me to church. Come, now, we have only just about time to catch our car."

It was a charming ride over the country roads to town. The day was perfect. The sun had never seemed quite so bright, the sky so blue or the floating clouds so fleecy white; while the foliage on every hand was ablaze with gorgeous tints that thrilled the beholder to silence with wonder and reverence for the Master Hand that had painted such marvelous hues. And when they entered the beautiful church which Mrs. Richards attended, an atmosphere of wondrous peace seemed, to Louis, to brood

over the place and hallow the service which followed.

It was an experience, a day, a service, a peace which left a lasting impress on the walls of memory's hall for all time. The sorrows, the hardships, the loneliness of the past few weeks were all forgotten—submerged beneath those uplifting influences and the joy that filled his consciousness—when the service was over and he passed out upon the street with his kind friend and up to the avenue where they were to take their car for home.

While they were waiting on the corner, two rough-looking men came out of a building on the opposite side of the street, where they stood talking for a few moments, then parted, one boarding a passing trolley, the other staggering to a near-by lamp-post, against which he leaned for support, in some doubt, apparently, regarding his ability to go on his way.

Neither Louis nor Mrs. Richards had observed either of them particularly, nor dreamed of the presence of an enemy to disturb their harmony until a repulsive oath greeted their ears and a heavy hand was laid on Louis' shoulder, when, turning suddenly, he found himself gazing into a pair of familiar sinister eyes which were fastened with a look of evil triumph upon him.

CHAPTER V.

“O—H!”

It was a long-drawn, shuddering breath, rather than a startled cry, and instantly all the brightness faded out of Louis' face, leaving him white and wild-eyed from fear and dismay.

“Aha! So ye're caught at last, eh? and this is a fine piece of luck for me!” chuckled the man gleefully as he gave his captive a vindictive shake. Then as his glance swept the boy's neatly clad figure from head to foot, noting his new hat and shoes, he went on: “Great Scott! haven't you grown a fine bird since you left the farm! Who's payin' the bills, I wonder!” And he supplemented his observations with a rude laugh and a revolting string of oaths.

“Stop, sir! Release the boy!”

The command was very quietly spoken, but with an authoritative intonation which instantly produced effect, for the man's hand involuntarily relaxed its grip upon Louis, while he turned his bloodshot eyes with a stare of stupid surprise upon the speaker.

“Eh!” he ejaculated, shrinking back a pace or two and evidently somewhat disconcerted upon finding himself confronted by the self-possessed, elegant-clad woman who had addressed him.

“What have you to do with this boy? Why are

you so rude to him?" Mrs. Richards demanded, at the same time laying a reassuring hand upon Louis' arm, and yet she suspected something of the truth.

"That's a matter that needn't concern you, marm, if you'll excuse me for saying it." And Louis' assailant began to bridle again while his language and manner were characterized by the utmost coarseness and insolence.

"It certainly does concern me, sir," Mrs. Richards asserted with quiet dignity, "for the boy is under my care."

"Under *your* care, is he? That's a good one!" sneered the intoxicated boor with a malicious leer. "P'raps you don't know he's nothing but a sneaking little pauper who belongs to the poor-farm up in —New Hampshire."

"Ah! Louis, do you know this man? Has he any authority over you?" Helen Richards inquired with a compassionate look in her gentle eyes as she turned to her youthful crestfallen companion.

"Yes'm; he's Nathan Black, the superintendent at the farm," Louis admitted with downcast eyes and white, trembling lips.

"That's right; you see he don't quite like to give an old friend the cold shoulder, for all he's grown such gay plumage and caught on to such high-toned nabobs since he took French leave of our fine institution up country," Nathan Black interposed with malicious sarcasm. "But come on," he roughly commanded. "I'll relieve the lady of all

further care of you and to-morrow morning we'll make tracks for New Hampshire. I tell you"—with an ugly grin—"we've been downright lonesome without you, you—runaway beggar; and we'll make it all-fired interesting for you when we get you back again," and his brawny hand closed once more with a fierce clutch upon Louis' shoulder.

"I—will never go back to that farm."

The words fell from the boy's lips with a firmness and decision that betrayed a dauntless spirit; and as he gave slow utterance to them he resolutely threw back his head and looked straight into the eyes of the brute before him.

"Eh! you won't go back to the farm? We'll see about that, you—" and another volley of oaths poured from his vile lips.

"Well, if you take me back I shall run away again," Louis inflexibly asserted, his steadfast look never wavering. "I know I'm only a boy and there's nobody in the world to take care of me; but I'm never going to be a pauper upon any town."

With a dexterous movement he wrenched himself free from his captor's grasp and quietly stepped back to Mrs. Richards' side; though being fleet of foot as a deer, he could easily have taken refuge in flight and so made good his escape from his unfortunate predicament.

Nathan Black's face grew purple with rage at thus being defied and he lifted his powerful arm, as if to strike the boy a cruel blow. But Mrs. Rich-

ards here calmly stepped in between them and faced the man.

"Mr. Black," she observed with quiet dignity, "it may be that you have authority to compel Louis to return to New Hampshire with you; but you are certainly in no condition to-day to provide for his comfort in a proper manner. I will give you my address and you can come out to-morrow morning, when we will talk this matter over and may, perhaps, have some satisfactory proposition to make you regarding the boy."

"No, you don't, marm. I'm not going to let my bird slip away from me now that I have got my paw on him. You're a mighty smooth-spoken woman, and you may mean to do the square thing," he went on, his eyes wavering and falling beneath her pure, direct gaze; "but he's got to go back, and I'm not going to lose sight of him—understand?"

He had moved a pace or two nearer her while speaking and Helen Richards shrank involuntarily away from him, for his hot, liquor-tainted breath was too offensive to be borne and his personal appearance repulsive in the extreme. She made no reply to his query, but stood for a moment, looking thoughtfully up the avenue, trying to think of some way of escape from the perplexing situation. She felt that it would be of no avail to reason with the man in his semi-intoxicated state, and yet she could not for a moment tolerate the idea of allowing Louis to go with him perhaps to some low, sin-laden locality where he doubtless would be neg-

lected if not ill-used. Suddenly her face lighted as the blue-coated figure of a policeman came into view, whereupon she signaled to him, and the next moment he was close at hand courteously inquiring:

"What is it, madam? Can I assist you in any way?"

She briefly explained the situation and concluded by saying:

"You can see for yourself that the man is in no condition to take charge of the boy. I feel it my duty to insist upon taking him home with me; but I will give the superintendent my address and pledge my word that he will find him there whenever he chooses to come for him——"

"It won't do, marm; I've no time nor money to waste running about the country for truant boys," Nathan Black here blusteringly interposed, although it was evident he was very ill at ease in the presence of the guardian of the public peace.

"It will not take him out of his way at all, Mr. Officer, for an electric line and the Boston and Maine Railway both run through the town," Mrs. Richards persisted, "and we are not five minutes' walk from the former."

The officer had listened respectfully to her story and realized that she was in the right; while, too, his sympathies were strongly enlisted for the manly little fellow who had borne himself so well during the controversy, for he had had his eye on the group for several moments before the lady had appealed to him.

"Let the boy go with madam," he briefly commanded, when she ceased speaking.

"Not if I know it," fiercely retorted the discomfited superintendent, with a supplemental oath.

The policeman lifted his hand authoritatively.

"Let the boy go," he repeated sternly. "As the lady says, you are not fit to look out for him, and you can go for him to-morrow, if you are bound to take him back to New Hampshire with you. Not a word, sir!" as the crestfallen man again began to bluster, "or I shall run you in for breaking the peace."

Mrs. Richards hastily wrote her father's address on a slip of paper, which she found in her purse, and passed it to the officer, who, after reading it, handed it to Nathan Black.

The man accepted it most ungraciously, stood irresolute for a moment, then with a surly scowl at Louis turned and walked unsteadily away, muttering angrily to himself as he went.

The policeman stood by Mrs. Richards and Louis until their car came along, when he helped the lady aboard, politely touching his hat to her in response to her graciously spoken thanks for his timely assistance and kindness.

Mrs. Richards sat absorbed in thought for some time after they had started on their way. She was considerably exercised in her mind regarding what had just occurred. She felt that it would be a great wrong to Louis to allow him to return to the miserable life from which he had fled and again come under the influence of a man so uncultured

and so lacking in moral responsibility as Nathan Black appeared to be.

"Something must be done to rescue this dear boy," she mused. "I cannot be reconciled to such a fate for him."

Glancing at him, she found him looking very grave, and in his dark eyes there was a pathetic expression of patient endurance that touched her deeply.

"Louis," she said softly in his ear, "we must not forget that there is One who overrules all evil, so 'let not your heart be troubled,' " and she concluded by giving him an encouraging little pat on the shoulder.

"I—I'm afraid I don't quite know how to get along without worrying about this," the boy replied in a repressed tone. "I don't want to go back to that farm. I know it isn't the right place for me, and——"

"Well, dear, it is a good deal to *know* that," his companion hastened to say, as he choked up suddenly; "and now if you can also *know* that God's child can never be anywhere but in his proper place, God will surely take care of the rest of it."

Louis glanced up quickly at her, giving her a comprehensive nod, and drew in a long, deep breath. A gleam of comfort had come to him with her reassuring words.

"That is just what Aunt Martha would have said," he returned, with a smile that chased much of the anxiety from his young face and left him brighter and more light-hearted.

"I think that dear woman must be perfectly lovely," observed Helen Richards, a thrill of emotion in her voice as she realized what a lasting influence for good Miss Wellington had exercised upon the character of this child whom she had befriended when deprived of his father and mother.

"She is," the boy positively affirmed. "Everybody loved her, though sometimes they used to laugh at her 'queer notions,' as they called them; but you couldn't come where she was without feeling that she loved you and that everything would go all right as long as she was around. If I couldn't have my mother, I—I *wish* I might have kept Aunt Martha," he concluded, with a wistful sigh that went straight to his listener's heart.

"But what would those dear little children out in Colorado have done without her?" she gently inquired.

"I didn't think of that. I suppose they did need her most and they are her own folks too," responded Louis, quick to perceive the delicately implied reproof.

"Well, dear, we must not forget that God is both father and mother to all His children, and everything will come right if we do our best and leave the results to Him," his companion rejoined, adding: "We really do not need to worry about the affairs of to-morrow simply because we cannot see our way clear to-day, any more than we need to fear that some evil will overtake us during the night because the sun has disappeared and left the earth in darkness; for we know that the sun is still shin-

ing and if we wait patiently all will be bright again. Ah! see how beautiful the lake is with all those gorgeous colors reflected in its clear depths!" she suddenly exclaimed, with gleaming eyes, as the car rounded a curve in the road and revealed a lovely sheet of water surrounded by overhanging trees, their foliage brilliant with a thousand wonderful tints that were faithfully reproduced in all their richness on its shining surface. "What a delightful world this is after all," she concluded with an appreciative sigh.

Louis' glance rested admiringly upon the exquisite picture, his somber eyes gradually brightening, his heavy heart involuntarily rebounding beneath an inspiration something like that which Longfellow must have experienced when he sang:

There is a beautiful spirit breathing now
Its mellow richness on the clustered trees,
And from a beaker full of richest dyes
Pouring new glory on the autumn woods
And dripping in warm light its pillared clouds.

Then after a minute or two he turned an almost adoring look upon the soul-lighted countenance beside him.

"If everybody was as kind as you and your folks, and if everybody had a father and mother and a good home, I think it would be a beautiful world," he returned, but with a plaintive note in his tones that was meltingly pathetic.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER her return from church and their Sunday dinner was over Mrs. Richards related to Mr. and Mrs. Weston what had occurred in connection with Louis and the intoxicated superintendent who had so inopportunately appeared upon the scene; whereupon there followed a grave discussion regarding the boy's future and what could be done to enable him to make the most of himself in life.

"As I said last night, I don't really need a boy, with a man on the place," Farmer Weston reflectively observed while discussing a plan that had already been talked over, "at the same time he's mighty handy to have around, and, after what you have just told me, I'd even be willing to make a place for him rather than have him go back to that New Hampshire poor-farm to be under a brute such as you describe."

"And you wouldn't feel it a burden, father, to assume such a responsibility at your time of life?" his daughter inquired.

"A burden, Helen! no, indeed; he has made me feel younger already during the few days he has been here. He is a bright, smart little chap and I'm drawn to him; but perhaps mother——"

He paused abruptly and glanced inquiringly at his wife.

“ ‘Mother’ will only be too happy if it can be arranged, as I told you last night,” Mrs. Weston hastened to affirm, adding: “I’ve seen many a lonely day since Clifford went home and wished we had a nice boy here to fill his place.”

Clifford was the son of a favorite niece, and had spent the previous year with the Westons, attending a select school in a neighboring town, while his parents were traveling abroad. It was his outgrown clothing which had been bestowed upon Louis.

“Dear mamma! you are always ready to reach out a helping hand,” said Mrs. Richards appreciatively. “It will be no sinecure to assume the training of such a boy,” she resumed meditatively, “although any one can see that he is well-bred and has been under lovely influences, especially during the last two years. There will be expense, too; but Will and I will take care of that if you will give him the home—that is, if we can arrange the legal formalities. However, William, being a lawyer, will know how to manage that part of it, and he will be here to-morrow morning.”

They talked more at length upon the subject, and Louis would have been very happy if he could have known of the many plans that were discussed in connection with his future—provided the superintendent would give him up.

His sleep was restful and unbroken that night, in spite of the impending fate which seemed to point to an enforced return to the obnoxious con-

ditions in life from which he had fled only a few weeks previous.

But he arose even earlier than usual the next morning and went directly to the chopping block upon which he began vigorous work.

"If I've got to go I'll leave Hannah a good pile of wood to remember me by," he had mentally asserted, while dressing himself in the dim light of the early dawn.

He and Hannah had become great friends during the few days of his sojourn in the farmhouse. He had won her heart by his readiness to forestall her needs; by keeping her coal scuttles and wood box well filled; running to the cellar for vegetables, and upon other errands too numerous to mention; while in return, instinctively knowing how the growing boy craves frequent reënforcements for his active digestion she kept him generously supplied with gingerbread, cookies and doughnuts which he affirmed were the "very nicest he had ever tasted."

On this occasion, too, he knew that only work and plenty of it would keep him from becoming very restless and unhappy while awaiting the dreaded appearance of the superintendent.

Mr. Richards returned during the forenoon, when he was warmly welcomed by the various members of the family. No time was lost in telling him the history of the stray waif who had wandered into their fold during his absence, and their benevolent plans for him.

His sympathies also were at once enlisted for

the boy, and he said there would be no difficulty in getting him legally transferred to their guardianship, provided he was willing to be so bound. He advised, however, that nothing be said to Louis to arouse his hopes until after he had looked into the matter more fully.

The forenoon passed. Still Nathan Black did not come. Hour after hour they looked for him; moment by moment they expected him, and when at last the sun, like a huge ball of fire, rolled softly out of sight behind a bank of gorgeous crimson and purple clouds and they knew it was too late for any local train to reach the town of — in New Hampshire that night, they began to think, with lightened hearts, that perhaps he might not come at all.

When the chores were all done, the stock comfortably bedded for the night, and the barn doors safely locked, Mr. Weston and Louis leisurely bent their steps toward the house, breathing freely for the first time that day.

"Well, my lad, your man didn't put in an appearance, after all," the farmer observed, while his glance rested very kindly upon his youthful companion.

Louis lifted a pair of brilliant eyes to him. The man's tone was so kind, his look so friendly, and his own relief so great, the last vestige of the burden of dread that had oppressed him all day in spite of his efforts to "let God take care of it," rolled from his heart and he suddenly felt light as air.

The next moment he let forth a resounding whoop of triumph as he turned a complete somersault and came up standing, flushed and smiling, before his friend.

"Well, I declare! there's no whoa to a boy!" Mr. Weston exclaimed, with a chuckle of appreciation, in view of the clever feat. "You've worked like a trooper all day and yet you are as frisky as a colt just turned out to pasture. I should think you'd be too tired to move."

"'Tired,' repeated Louis with another exultant shout, as over he went again. "I'm too *glad* to be tired," he added, panting from the exertion as he regained his feet.

"Glad because that man, Black, didn't come?"

Louis nodded, and stooped to recover his hat, which he had tossed upon the ground previous to his athletic performances.

"So you've been dreading him all day?" inquiringly remarked his companion.

"Yes, sir; but it's all gone now—the dread."

"You think he won't come at all?"

"I don't know; he may," said Louis thoughtfully; "but I don't believe I'll ever go back to the farm to live."

"H'm. What has given you that assurance?" and Mr. Weston eyed him curiously, wondering if he could have overheard anything that would lead him to suspect the plans which the family had in mind for him.

Louis flushed and seemed embarrassed by the question.

"Tell me, my boy; I would really like to know what has made you so light-hearted all at once." The farmer's tone was kindly insistent.

"'Twas something Mrs. Richards told me yesterday," returned Louis, in a low voice, while he diffidently dug a grimy toe into the ground.

"Well, what was it she told you?"

"She—said—if I would *know* that God's child can never be anywhere but in his proper place, God would take care of the rest of it; and I've been saying it over all day and trying to *feel* it," the boy explained.

"And you believed it—you've really trusted like that?" said the farmer with a sense of condemnation for his own lack of faith as compared with this child-like confidence.

"I've tried to. It's been a kind of see-saw most all day between being afraid and knowing; but the more I've said it over, the more sure I've grown to feel about it, till now I don't feel afraid at all." His placid face testified to the truth of his words.

"H'm! What you and Mrs. Richards call 'knowing,' I should say was a saving kind of faith—rather better than the 'mustard-seed' kind I've been sowing for more'n forty years without getting a very satisfactory harvest," reflectively remarked the man. "But—suppose, after all, that man should come along to-morrow morning and trot you off to New Hampshire with him?"

Mr. Weston was uncomfortably conscious that this

was rather a cruel thrust; but he was unaccountably impelled to put the boy to the test.

Louis' face fell and he did not reply for a moment.

"Well," he said at length, "that wouldn't prove that it was the 'right place' for me, and I"—swallowing hard—"I should try to keep on knowing that God would take care of it, just the same."

Farmer Weston moved on again toward the house without making any further comment on the subject; but his face wore a very thoughtful look. A little later he repeated this conversation to his wife and gravely observed in conclusion:

"There's a difference between Helen's and that boy's faith and mine—it's certainly stronger to 'know' than to 'believe.' I guess our girl hasn't got so far off the track, after all, and if that's the kind of religion she's been getting, with those queer notions of her, I'm not going to quarrel with her any more about it."

Mrs. Weston smiled serenely upon her husband without replying. She had long been growing in sympathy with her daughter's higher thought and interpretation of the Bible, while her husband, on the contrary, had been very much opposed to any innovations upon his established creed and its literal explications.

Although secretly amazed by this acknowledged concession, Mrs. Weston, being a wise woman, knew when to let well enough alone and discreetly held her peace.

"A little child shall lead them," she quoted softly to herself, however, as she left him to go and tell Louis that Mr. Richards wanted to have a little talk with him before he went to bed.

She found him in the kitchen having a social chat with Hannah, and after delivering her message she observed:

"You'd better put on your other clothes first, then come into the sitting-room."

Louis bounded nimbly away to his chamber, whistling merrily, as he proceeded to obey her behest.

He had only seen Mr. Richards from a distance as yet; but after thoughtfully studying him for a minute or two he had decided that he was O. K. and just about the kind of man he would expect and like Mrs. Richards' husband to be.

Mrs. Weston was waiting for him in the kitchen when he came down and led him into a room he had not seen before, and where he found Mr. and Mrs. Richards seated by a blazing wood fire, for the evening had grown chilly after the sun went down.

Mr. Richards, an intellectual, fine-looking man, greeted Louis in a cordial, off-hand way that at once put the boy at ease, then immediately broached the subject he wished to discuss.

"Mrs. Richards has told me your story, Louis," he began, "and how desirous you are to find a better home than the farm where you have been living. How do you think you would like to live here with Mr. Weston?"

The boy's face grew radiant.

"Could I? Does he want me? Would Mr. Black let me?" he burst forth, almost breathless from the joyful leap his heart had given at the unexpected proposition.

"There cannot be much doubt about your attitude regarding such an arrangement," remarked the gentleman, smiling at his eagerness. "Mr. Black can have no voice whatever in the matter; that will be settled by the proper authorities in the town where you have lived. Mrs. Richards has set her face very strongly against your going back there, and, as Mr. Weston thinks he would like to have just such a boy as you about the place, she has proposed that he keep you with him, if you think you could be happy here."

Louis turned an adoring look upon the beautiful, daintily-robed woman, who, sitting on one side of the fireplace, made a lovely picture, with the red light of the flames playing over her; while she, meeting his glance, returned it with a friendly nod and smile.

"There isn't any *if* about it, sir," positively affirmed the boy, but in a voice that was suspiciously tremulous.

"That's easy, then," said Mr. Richards in a cheery tone; "and now if the New Hampshire business can be arranged as quickly and harmoniously—and I think it can—we'll soon be able to make a Massachusetts citizen of you. How old are you, my boy?"

"Twelve, the tenth of last July."



He approached the house with a heavy step and a surly air.

"Twelve? Not quite old enough yet to be allowed to choose your own guardians; but if you could have your say about it, do you think you would be willing to trust me to manage your future until you are twenty-one? Mr. Weston thinks he would prefer me to assume that responsibility."

The gentleman awaited the youth's reply with no little interest.

Louis' dark eyes swept both faces before him in a lightning glance.

"I'd trust any of you with *everything*," he burst forth impulsively, but with certain signs of emotion which warned his friends that he was getting too full for utterance, and it might be as well to change the subject for the time.

"I thank you in the name of the family, Louis," returned Mr. Richards with a pleasant laugh; "and since you are so complacent we will regard these preliminaries as settled and await the next move from Mr. Black before we take any further steps. Now, dear," turning to his wife, "suppose we have a hymn or two before Louis goes to bed?"

Mrs. Richards went at once to the piano and the "hymn or two" proved to be half a dozen. Louis was invited to join in any that he knew, and, being familiar with most of them, his fresh, boyish treble harmonized very pleasantly with their maturer voices.

Farmer Weston and his wife, sitting in a small adjoining room, paused, the one in his reading, the other in her sewing, to listen, an expression of keen

enjoyment on their faces. Mr. Weston even hummed a musical tenor to the second verse of an old-time favorite of his:

“Beneath His watchful eye
His saints securely dwell.
The hand that bears creation up
Shall guard His children well.”

“That sounds like a different song as they sing it, father,” Mrs. Weston observed, with shining eyes. “They seem to *know* that they are ‘secure’ and every word bristles with a different meaning. Listen!” she added as the last two lines of the next verse rang melodiously and triumphantly through the whole house:

“I’ll drop my burden at His feet
And bear a song away.”

“That’s just what they know how to do—just what Louis has done to-day—drop their burdens,” she went on wistfully. “Or rather, they never seem to have any burdens to drop; they’re always well and happy; never anxious, care-worn or tired. It certainly is a more practical religion than we’ve been taught, Benjamin.”

“I’m not so sure about that, mother; I’m inclined to think our good old faith has helped us to bear a good many burdens during the forty years we’ve pulled together,” her husband opposed with

a familiar settling of his square chin which betrayed that he was not yet ready to forsake the well-beaten paths of his Presbyterian fraternity.

"I know we've tried to think so, but it has never kept us from worrying ourselves almost to death before some of them rolled off. We've *said* God would overrule everything for good and we've claimed we believed His promises; but we have never really trusted or dropped the burden and begun to sing because we knew He would do as He promised," Mrs. Weston remarked, as, with hands lying idly upon her neglected work, she thoughtfully rocked back and forth in her chair. "We did not know how to let go," she went on musingly, "but Helen does, and I believe that boy has the secret of it, too. If he stays with us I shall watch the practical application of his faith with a great deal of interest."

"Well, maybe you're right, mother," Farmer Weston at length observed, although it was evident he was laboring under strong constraint, "maybe you're right, and I've no authority to clip your wings, if you've begun to soar into Helen's higher atmosphere; but I've always felt that the old way was good enough for me; and you and I have kept pace for so many years, I had grown to feel that we would go on together to the end of the journey."

He stopped abruptly and turned back to the book he had been reading; but evidently it had lost its interest for him, for, after nervously turning its pages for a few minutes, he laid it down, arose, and left the room.

“He isn’t satisfied with the old ruts any more than I am,” murmured his wife, gazing wistfully at the door through which he had passed. “The ‘old way’ is good as far as it goes, but—it doesn’t go far enough.”

She resumed her sewing, taking a few stitches until a great tear splashed down upon it; then another and another, when, casting it aside, she drew her Bible from her work-basket and was soon absorbed in the study of its well-worn pages.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER breakfast on Tuesday morning, just as Mr. Weston and Louis, armed with their hoes and basket, were on the point of starting again for the potato field, they observed a man enter the side yard and approach the house with a heavy step and surly air.

"There he comes!" exclaimed Louis, with a quick indrawn breath of dismay, while Ponce, also catching sight of the intruder, uttered a warning bark of disapproval.

"The man Black?" inquired Mr. Weston, bending a look of keen scrutiny upon the unwelcome stranger.

"Yes, sir; be still, Ponce!" and Louis' hand closed firmly over the collar of the dog, who showed a decided inclination to make himself disagreeable to the intruder.

The superintendent by no means presented a very prepossessing appearance as he came nearer. He was even more repulsive than when he had accosted Louis on Sunday. His bloated, crimson face and bloodshot eyes gave unmistakable evidence of the demoralizing debauch of the last few days. His linen was soiled and wrinkled, his clothes dusty and defaced; and his unsteady gait betrayed that he was still under the influence of liquor.

"Here, you young rascal!" he called out coarsely as he caught sight of Louis. "Get on your togs and come along. We'll go as far as Lowell by the electrics and take a train from there. Get a move on, can't you? Don't stand there staring at nothing, as if you'd lost your wits," he concluded, with an impatient oath, for the boy seemed half-dazed by his appearance. He had really begun to feel that the man would never come for him.

Mr. Richards, who had been sitting upon the porch, now arose and moved toward the steps.

"Good morning, sir," was his courteous greeting. "I infer that you are Mr. Black?"

"Well, that is supposed to be my name," the man returned, with an aggressively rising inflection on each word, at the same time plunging his hands into his pockets and facing the gentleman with a defiant air.

"Come up on the porch, Mr. Black, and have a chair while you are waiting," Mr. Richards continued in a friendly tone, as he placed a comfortable rocker for their ill-mannered visitor. "I would like to have a little talk with you regarding Louis," he added.

Nathan Black shot a curious look at the speaker, who, ignoring his rudeness, had addressed him with the utmost politeness. He hesitated an instant, as if uncertain of his ground, then boldly swaggered forward and threw himself noisily into the proffered chair. /

"Well, what have you got to say about the brat?" he sullenly demanded.

"Louis came to us last Thursday; he has made himself very helpful and agreeable, and we, as a family, have become deeply interested in him and would like to keep him with us," said Mr. Richards, coming at once to the point. "We feel he is too bright a boy to be reared on a poor-farm, and as my father-in-law, Mr. Weston," glancing at the farmer who had approached near enough to overhear the conversation, "is willing to give him a home for what he can do, while between us we will see that he is properly educated, I intended, as you did not come for him yesterday, to write to the officers of your town to-day and make them a proposition to this effect."

"That would be mighty fine for the boy!" sneered the superintendent, with a sinister leer at Louis, which caused Ponce to prick up his ears and growl threateningly in return; "but I've nothing to do with your 'propositions.' The overseers of the poor put the young beggar in my care, and as I'm responsible for him, he's got to go back with me, now I've found him. There's been a devil of a fuss over his disappearance, as it is."

Disagreeable rumors regarding the man's ill treatment of the boy had been circulated in the town, whereupon there had ensued an uncomfortable investigation, which by no means had increased his liking for Louis.

"Suppose I pledge my word to send him back

at my own expense if the authorities reject our proposals?" Mr. Weston here interposed.

"No, sir; he's got to go back with me to-day," doggedly affirmed Nathan Black, his flushed face taking on an even deeper hue from jealousy and ill-will, in view of the esteem in which Louis appeared to be held by his new friends.

"Very well, if that is your decision, I shall accompany him and make my proposals verbally," observed Mr. Richards with an air of sudden determination, and rising as he spoke to get himself in readiness for the trip. "Perhaps, after all, it will be the better plan and bring the matter to an earlier settlement. Louis," approaching the youth, who had quietly remained in the background, "go, get ready; Mr. Black refuses to allow you to remain with us, so I am going along with you to see what can be done for you. It will all come out right, my boy, so have no fear—I am almost sure I shall bring you back with me," he concluded encouragingly, as he noticed the anxious look in the boy's eyes and that he had grown very white about the mouth.

Louis turned reluctantly away and mounted to his room. His heart was heavy and his steps faltered; but, recalling Mr. Weston's questions of the previous evening and his own replies, he bravely tried to keep on, "knowing that God would take care of it." "He isn't going back on His word when He has promised to give us what we ask for," he said to himself as he was hurriedly dressing for his trip; and almost instantly the burden of fear and dread

rolled from his heart again, leaving him calm and hopeful.

Fifteen minutes later, the trio were on their way to New Hampshire with the expectation of reaching their destination late that afternoon.

Ponce would have followed Louis, and whined piteously when his master sternly commanded: "Come back and lie down, sir!" The collie appeared to know that something was going wrong with his new friend, and several times during the day he wandered down to the gate through which the boy had passed and stood looking wistfully in the direction he had gone.

The party had a long ride to the county town in New Hampshire, where, after an hour's wait, they were to take a local train going in another direction, and where, too, Louis was first introduced to our readers at the fair.

Here Mr. Richards, thinking he betrayed signs of restlessness and thirst, asked Nathan Black to lead the way to the best inn in the place, saying he was hungry and would act as host for the party; whereupon they proceeded to a very good hotel, where an appetizing and well-cooked dinner was served them, the self-constituted host taking care that most of the hour was spent at the table, so leaving only a few minutes in which to catch their train, thus making it impossible for the superintendent to secure a coveted drink. Consequently, for the first time in years, after one of his periodical visits to Boston, Nathan Black returned to his home a sober man.

Upon reaching their destination Mr. Richards, accompanied by Louis, at once sought the proper town officials and laid his proposals before them.

It is almost needless to say that they found immediate favor, for there was hardly a family in the place who had not been deeply grieved to have so promising a boy as Louis, the son of one of their most respected citizens, consigned to the doleful life and doubtful influences of their home for the poor; but many had large families and heavy responsibilities of their own and could not add to them, while others were too poor to assume a burden which they knew they would be unable to carry.

Not much could be done that evening, but an interview was arranged for the following morning, and at this meeting the necessary preliminary steps were taken which were to result in the legal appointment of William Richards, Esq., of Chicago, Illinois, as guardian to Louis Arnold, who was thus made—or at least believed himself to be—the happiest boy in the United States.

This visit also gave Louis the opportunity to secure a few little treasures which Aunt Martha had preserved for him at the time of the auction—his mother's work-box and its contents, some family photographs, a box containing, among other things, some choice books that had belonged to his father and which she wisely judged he would prize later in life; and there were also a few well-chosen gifts which she had presented to him from time to time.

These had all been consigned to the care of a

good woman in the village when he was sent to the farm, and it was with a light heart that he now went to claim them and inform her of the promising future awaiting him.

On their way back to Boston they had another wait in the town where they had changed cars the previous day, and Louis asked his guardian's permission to run about a little, promising to be on hand before it was time for their train to leave.

This was readily granted, and the boy hurried away to the post office, intent upon an errand which had occupied his thoughts a good deal of the time during his trip the day before.

"Well, my son, what can I do for you?" the genial postmaster inquired in a kindly tone, as Louis presented himself at the general delivery window.

"I've come to ask, sir, if you know a boy in this town by the name of Ted, or a girl called Gipsy?" Louis questioned, but flushing with embarrassment as he realized the awkwardness of the situation in being compelled to be so indefinite regarding the parties he wished to find.

" 'A boy named Ted and a girl called Gipsy'! " repeated the man, a smile of amusement hovering about his lips. "I'm afraid that is a riddle I shall be unable to solve unless you give me more of a cue. Don't you know the last name of the young people?"

"No, sir; but I'll tell you why I'm trying to find them," said Louis confidentially, and he proceeded to relate the incidents of the day of the county fair, when he had made the acquaintance of

Ted and Gipsy, and the latter had presented him with a bag of candy in which he had afterwards found the pretty ring belonging to her, and which he was now trying to return to its owner.

The postmaster gave his closest attention to the story, but shook his head doubtfully when it was concluded. "I'm afraid I can't help you, my boy," he said, but smiled sympathetically into the earnest face uplifted to his. "I don't know any girl named Gipsy. Ted sounds as if it might be short for Theodore, but I do not think of anyone answering to your description. Possibly the family does not live here—they may have come to the fair from some adjoining town, or they may be merely summer residents somewhere in the country. I am sorry, my lad, since you are so anxious to restore the ring; doubtless Miss Gipsy herself experienced no little regret over the unfortunate episode."

"That's the worst of it, sir—to think she had to be made so unhappy when she tried to be so kind to me," Louis regretfully returned.

"I guess she must have dipped her own small fingers into that bag of sweets before she passed it over to you. What's your opinion?" facetiously remarked the postmaster.

"That's what I thought, too," said Louis, flushing, and with an answering dimple showing in either cheek. "But I thank you, sir, for being so kind," he added, lifting his hat as he backed away from the window and left the office.

"It's too confounded bad and makes me darned

mad!” he impatiently exclaimed as he stepped out upon the street. Then he stopped short, flushing consciously and added: “I guess Aunt Martha’d have given me a black mark for those words if she’d heard me; but I was sure I’d get Gipsy’s name at the office.”

He had been building a very pretty castle in the air all the way up from Boston the day before, and it was exceedingly disappointing to have it thus demolished by a single blow. He had fondly believed there would be no difficulty in ascertaining the identity of Miss Gipsy, by paying a visit to the post office. Then, having learned her name, he intended writing her a letter in which he would inclose her ring and tell her where he had found it and how glad he was to return it.

Of course she would have to reply, thanking him, or perhaps Ted would write for her; thus he hoped a correspondence would be established that would keep him in touch with them, or result in his meeting them again sometime. But these cherished plans had come to naught, and his sense of disappointment was so great that he had allowed himself to become excessively irritated even to the extent of using unbecoming language.

He paused in his walk and leaned against an electric-light post, looking both cross and unhappy. “Look here, Louis Arnold, this isn’t going to do,” he said after a moment; “you’ve no business to get mad over a little thing like that, when you’ve just had so much come to you to be thankful for. Let’s

see"—lifting a thoughtful look to a group of fleecy clouds that were skimming across the sky above him as if seeking light upon a difficult problem—"there's a Bible rule for everything and there must be one that'll fit this. That ring belongs to Gipsy, and it is right for me to get it back to her some way. It says 'Seek and ye shall find,' so I'm going to try to *know* that I shall find what it is right for me to seek. There! that is the best I know how to do and I'm not going to worry over it any more." He started on his way again with a bright face and alert step, soon rejoining Mr. Richards at the station, where, ten minutes later, they boarded their train for home. After they were comfortably seated Louis drew forth from an inside pocket of his jacket a small package tied with a narrow, blue ribbon. This he carefully removed and also the wrapper, revealing half a dozen photographs which he began to study earnestly.

"What have you there, Louis?" inquired Mr. Richards, who had been observing him with considerable interest.

"Some pictures—this is my mother's," said the boy, with a tender thrill of mingled pride and love in his tone; and the gentleman found himself looking upon the face of one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, while he also saw that Louis resembled her to a remarkable degree.

"And this is one of my father," the lad continued, as he presented another of a young man who appeared to have been about thirty years of age at the

time it was taken. He had a well-shaped head, a refined, intellectual face; but there was a look of delicacy in both frame and features that indicated a lack of strength and vitality.

"Your father and mother both look like cultured people, Louis," Mr. Richards observed, after studying the faces intently. "Aha!" and he smiled broadly as the boy shyly slipped the likeness of an infant in long clothes into his hand, "this little chap is wonderfully like you; I am sure he was named Louis Arnold."

"Yes, sir; that was taken when I was six months old," he replied. "I think this must be my grandmother," he added, handing him a rather faded picture of an elderly woman, "but I am not quite sure, only I think my mother looks a little like her—I never saw it before. And this man—I don't know anything about. I found the pictures in a box of old letters put away with some books.

"Ah, an English captain!" observed his companion as he saw the stalwart form in its trig, British uniform; while from the intelligent, resolute face and the alert, yet dignified attitude of the figure he was impressed that the man must have been a strong and self-reliant character.

Turning the card over he saw written on the back, in a clear, somewhat precise hand:

"Captain John Sherburne, of Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh."

"He looks a soldier, every inch," said Mr. Richards; "perhaps he was your grandfather?"

"No, sir, for my mother's name was Annie Judkins. He may have been her uncle, but I don't know—she never seemed to like to talk about her folks, though she would sometimes tell me of things that happened in England when she was a little girl," Louis explained.

"Then she was English," remarked his listener.

"Yes, sir; she was born there, but came here when she was about ten years old."

"I see you have still another picture," Mr. Richards observed, glancing at an envelope which Louis had separated from the others.

The boy made no reply, but quietly drawing forth the card it contained laid it in his hand, and the man found himself looking into the face of a woman of perhaps forty years of age.

It was not a beautiful face, it was not even striking; but it was a fine face, strong and earnest, yet gentle and lovable.

A small, symmetrical head was well poised upon a slender neck above a pair of graceful shoulders. A pair of clear, true, soulful eyes looked out from beneath a thoughtful brow; the nose was straight, the nostrils delicately chiseled; the mouth was firm, yet tender; indeed all the features were clear-cut and regular and were all aglow with some inward loveliness that was far more attractive than mere physical beauty. Character, individuality and love for humanity were written on every lineament.

It was a modern photograph, well taken and well finished, and as he studied it with increasing in-

terest, Mr. Richards found himself wishing that he might know the woman whom it represented. Louis watched him curiously, noting the appreciative expression in his fine eyes. "That is Aunt Martha, sir," he at length volunteered in a tone of mingled affection and pride, while his glance dropped fondly to the face he loved so well.

"Indeed! Well, she looks just as I would expect the woman you have told us about to look. I am sure, my boy, Miss Wellington is one in a thousand, and you have a right to love and be proud of such a friend," returned his companion as he gave back the likeness to the lad, who carefully replaced it in its envelope and tucked it away by itself into one of his pockets.

Then, gathering up the others, he made them into a neat package, retying the blue ribbon around the wrapper as deftly as a girl would have tied it; after which he put it snugly away, as he supposed, into the inner pocket of his jacket from which he had taken it.

Half an hour later they alighted at the station in their own town, when a ride of ten minutes more on a trolley brought them to within a stone's throw of Farmer Weston's home, where they were cordially welcomed by the entire family, not excepting Ponce, who manifested the most extravagant delight over Louis' return.

After Mr. Richards and Louis had stepped from the train at the end of their journey, a fine-looking,

richly-dressed lady boarded the same car and, strangely enough, slipped into the very seat they had just vacated. Opening a handsome bag which hung from her wrist, she found her ticket, but in the act of closing the receptacle again the bit of pasteboard dropped from her fingers and fell fluttering to the floor under the seat in front of her.

Stooping to recover it, she found lying just at her feet a small package, tied with a blue ribbon.

"Ah! some one has lost it," she murmured, viewing it curiously. "I wonder if it is anything that is valuable! I think I will be justified in examining it to ascertain if it will be worth advertising."

But the conductor making his appearance just at that moment, she dropped it into her bag while she asked some question about the arrival of the train in town, so for the time the package was forgotten.

When she alighted from her car, on reaching Boston, she was met by a portly, prosperous-looking man, to whom, after saluting him affectionately, she remarked: "John, dear, have you had a good day? I hope your business is satisfactorily arranged and we can go on to-night. I am longing to get home."

"Yes, Madelaine, everything has gone smoothly, and I have just secured a section in a Pullman train that will leave at nine. Meantime, we'll run up to the Touraine for a good dinner and a little rest," the gentleman replied, at the same time beckoning to a cabman who was hovering near them.

When they were seated within the vehicle, and while the lady was looking for her handkerchief, the little package came to light.

"Oh, see what I have found!" she exclaimed, and slipping it into her companion's hand she explained how it had come into her possession.

"What is in it?" the man inquired, eyeing it curiously.

"I don't know; I haven't looked."

The gentleman pulled the ribbon, removed the wrapper and his glance fell upon the photograph of an English soldier, resplendent in his captain's uniform. It possessed no interest for him, however, until, almost unconsciously, he reversed the card and read, written there:

"Capt. John Sherburne of Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh."

Fortunately his wife was at that moment engaged in disentangling the lace on her sleeve from the fastening of her bag, otherwise she must have observed the violent start and strange appearance of her husband.

There was not an atom of color in his face, a wild look of fear had leaped into his eyes and great drops of perspiration gathered thick upon his forehead and about his mouth.

For a moment everything grew dark about him and consciousness seemed about to fail him. Suddenly reaching forth his hand he dashed down the window beside him.

"How close the carriage is!" he muttered, and,

leaning out, he drew a full, deep breath, whereupon he began to recover himself somewhat.

"Yes, and there is a bad odor here, too—stale smoke, I think," returned the lady still busy with her lace. "There!" she added as she finally released the delicate fabric, "this ruffling is always catching on something. Now, tell me what treasures you have discovered in that mysterious little package," she laughingly concluded as she leaned forward to look within the wrapper.

"Nothing but a few photographs," her companion managed to say in an indifferent tone, while he dexterously separated the picture of the soldier from the others and passed them to her.

"Not a very valuable possession, yet no doubt whoever lost them prized them highly," observed his wife as she looked them over, adding with a wistful note in her voice: "What a dear, pretty baby! such lovely eyes! just like his mother's. Hadn't we better advertise them, John?"

The man's heart leaped into his throat at the suggestion.

"Well, perhaps," he said after a moment of hesitancy. "I'll see about the matter later," and gently taking them from her he replaced the wrapper and ribbon, then shoved them into the depths of an inner pocket, drawing a long breath of relief as he did so.

"They wouldn't let you have Josie?" he remarked inquiringly a moment later.

"No, Harriet thought it would make a bad break

in her school, but she said she might spend the next vacation with us, if we care to have her," returned his wife.

"If we care to have her," repeated her husband with a suggestive laugh. "Why, I'd give half my fortune if Josephine Ashton was our own daughter."

The lady sighed softly.

"How fond of Josie you are!" she said, then added regretfully: "But I am afraid she is getting a little spoiled by wealth and overindulgence; she showed signs of selfishness and snobbishness during our visit."

"Oh, that will all wear off. She has the real stuff in her and will make a mighty fine woman by and by," confidently asserted the man in defense of his favorite, and the next moment the cab came to a stop.

A moment or two later he was standing in the office of the Touraine, making an entry in the register.

This was what he wrote:

"John Sherburne and wife, Chicago, Illinois."

And John Sherburne was the man who, on the day of the county fair in New Hampshire a few weeks previous, had been so startled upon beholding Louis Arnold, as that gentleman was driving by the judges' stand; and who, later, had sought him out again and, armed with a tempting bag of peanuts to attract his attention, had questioned him regarding his parentage. His wife was the lady who had been his companion in the carriage at that time.

CHAPTER VIII

ON his return from New Hampshire Louis felt very light-hearted as he reëntered the hospitable farmhouse, where he was so cordially welcomed. It was to be his home. There was now a place in the world which he could feel was his own, because what service he could give would be regarded to some extent at least as an equivalent for what he received; and he would no longer be subjected to abuse and degrading slurs on account of his poverty and dependence.

"So, Louis, you have come back to be our boy?" Mr. Weston remarked as he laid his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder and smiled into his animated face and happy eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you don't feel homesick, now that the die is cast," and a twinkle gleamed in the man's own eyes, as he contrasted the youth's present appearance with his dejection of the previous morning.

"No, sir," emphatically, and Louis' eyes wandered appreciatively around the cosy sitting-room, all rose-hued from the crimson shaded lamp on the table and the cheerful blaze upon the hearth, and finally rested contentedly upon Mrs. Weston's moth-

erly face. "No, sir," he repeated; "I've never been in so nice a place since my father and mother went away."

"And I hope you both have brought back a good appetite," Mrs. Weston here interposed, for her quick ear had caught the slight faltering of the boy's tone as he referred to his parents. "Supper is all ready and we were only waiting for you to come. And, Louis," leading the way into the dining-room and laying her hand upon a chair at her left, "you are to eat with us and sit here, now that you belong to us."

And Louis felt almost too happy to contain himself upon being thus promoted to a place with the family. He had hitherto eaten with Hannah in the kitchen, and, although he had been grateful for that privilege, and had had plenty to appease his hunger, it had not been particularly homelike, after Aunt Martha's daintily appointed table, though far better than the one at the farm.

After supper they all gathered around the fire in the sitting-room and passed a social hour together, discussing the various incidents connected with the recent trip, and much gratification was expressed because everything had been so expeditiously and satisfactorily arranged.

When Louis was about to retire for the night Mrs. Weston remarked:

"Louis, hereafter you are to have the little room at the head of the backstairs; you know the one I mean. Pleasant dreams to you, dear. I am very

glad your home is to be with us," she concluded in a motherly tone.

Louis lifted an indescribable look to her; then, with a low-voiced "good night" to them all, quickly left the room.

Mrs. Weston had called him "dear," just as if he really belonged to them, and the softly spoken word of affection caused such a lump to come into his throat that he was obliged to get out of sight as soon as possible—"before he made a girl of himself and cried," he confidentially whispered in the ear of Ponce, whose feathery tail thumped a welcome upon the floor as he came into the kitchen, where, stooping down, Louis gave the collie a vigorous hug to relieve the tension of the moment.

His face glowed with delight when, upon mounting the back stairs, he entered his new room.

"By Jingo! this is just—bully!" he exclaimed with boyish enthusiasm as his sweeping glance took in its furnishings—the pretty white bed with its spotless spread; the strip of bright carpeting laid over the matting before it; the dainty muslin draperies at the windows, and other attractive though simple accessories. There was a new comb and brush and toothbrush on one end of his bureau; a tiny clock on the opposite side; and a pretty pin-cushion in the center.

A small table covered with an immaculate towel stood between the windows, and upon it rested a well-worn Testament, with some other books. In one corner there was a commode furnished with a

pitcher, bowl and towels; and on the wall opposite there hung a couple of shelves on which a few more books were neatly arranged.

"Oh, I just wish Aunt Martha could see it!" he breathed, with a long-drawn sigh of content. "She'd be awfully glad; but I'll write her all about it," he concluded as he put his light upon the table and took up his Testament for his evening reading.

During his absence Jerry McLeod, the hired man, had returned to the farm and Louis was formally introduced to him the next morning when he went below at the usual hour to assist with the chores. The man was Scotch by birth and had come to this country when a lad of ten. He had entered Mr. Weston's employ at the age of seventeen and had served him faithfully for fifteen years; consequently he regarded himself as a permanent fixture on the place, if indeed he did not consider that he was the monarch of all he surveyed.

He had appeared somewhat crestfallen when informed that henceforth there was to be a boy on the farm; for, naturally, he was inclined to be jealous of his position and did not relish the idea of having another step into the traces there to, perhaps, eventually crowd him out.

He looked askance at Louis when Hannah introduced them and mumbled a rather gruff "mornin';" then experienced another twinge of jealousy when Ponce, leaping forward with a joyous bark, arose on his hind legs and placing his paws on the boy's shoulders licked his cheek in affectionate greeting.

"Humph! don't need a boy here any more'n the buggy needs five wheels," Jerry grimly informed Hannah, as Louis, followed by the collie, left the kitchen.

"Mebbe not; but the boy needed a home," sentimentously rejoined the maid, "and," she added, a mischievous sparkle in her keen, black eyes, "he's the very nicest boy I ever did see."

Now, as Hannah had been at the farm even longer than Jerry, this was rather a sharply barbed arrow from her quiver and did not tend to soothe the man's ruffled feelings, even though he was accustomed to her chaffing and, under certain circumstances, rather enjoyed it.

"You don't say, Mis' Belknap," he retorted with bland sarcasm. "Much obleeged to you, I'm sure," and he made a would-be-dignified exit through the back door, which, however, he did not close very softly after him.

Louis resumed his duties in a very happy frame of mind and was made even more light of heart when Mr. Weston informed him that he was to begin school the following Monday. As an offset to this, however, he also learned that Mr. Richards and his wife would leave for the West on the same day.

Saturday these kind friends took him to Boston to provide him with a suitable outfit for winter. It was a wonderful experience for him as he went about the busy streets of the city, visiting the various stores to make his purchases. He had never had

such nice, stylish clothing before, and said to himself, as he noted the generous sums of money paid out for it, that Mr. Richards must be an "awful rich man." He wondered, too, how he could ever do enough to make up for the many favors he was receiving.

Monday morning his guardian accompanied him to school and introduced him to the principal, who, after an examination, assigned him to the eighth grade; but told him, as he was so late in entering, he would have to work diligently in order to make up arrears and keep with his class.

That same evening Mr. and Mrs. Richards left for Chicago, and life at the farm fell into its usual routine.

Louis proved himself a good worker both at home and in school. He was not a brilliant scholar, but, being a conscientious student, his lessons were well prepared, and recited in a way to show that he comprehended what he had learned.

He was well received by his schoolmates and proved himself a "jolly good fellow," entering into all their sports with a hearty abandon which testified to his thorough enjoyment of them.

Since his future had been definitely settled, he had lost the strained, anxious expression which had made his young face look careworn and older than his years; and in the rebound of his spirits he became happy and light-hearted—"like an invigorating breeze in the house," said Farmer Weston and his wife, both of whom were becoming strongly attached to him.

But during his third week of school he observed a change in the atmosphere about him. The boys gathered in groups eyeing him askance, talking mysteriously among themselves the while. He was not asked to join their games as heretofore, and if he manifested an inclination to participate in them, there would be a general stampede to some other portion of the grounds.

This uncomfortable state of affairs was suddenly brought to a crisis one morning, when, on entering the playground, Louis observed quite a commotion among the boys.

The bully of the school, Ben Pratt by name, was tyrannizing over two or three small children, compelling them, by threats and rough usage, to do all manner of ridiculous tricks for the entertainment of the older ones.

Louis, who could never see even an animal abused without tingling to his finger tips with indignation, now felt his eyes beginning to blaze and his blood to boil as a sharp slap resounded on the air and was followed by a howl of pain from one of the youngsters. The next moment he dashed forward and slipped in between the bully and his helpless victim.

"What are you doing, Ben Pratt, cuffing a little shaver like that?" he cried, with crimson cheeks, adding: "Run away, Harry Barnes; if Ben wants to slap anybody again he can take me."

The little fellow needed no second bidding, and nimbly made tracks for a place of safety, the others following him with all possible dispatch.

"Well, I'll be blamed!" cried Ben Pratt, gazing in unfeigned astonishment at the self-constituted committee of protection against cruelty to children.

Then his anger at being balked of his fun blazed forth fiercely.

"What d'you mean, meddling with what's none of your business?" he yelled. "I'll break your head!"

He drew off and made a great show of putting himself in a fighting attitude.

"I shall always meddle when I see a great fellow like you picking on a boy who can't make any show against you," returned Louis, facing his opponent unflinchingly, his great, brown eyes flashing scorn and a determination to stand up to the finish.

But Ben Pratt was only a blustering coward. For a moment he gazed back into those resolute eyes, reading in their clear depths a courage and strength of purpose against which he knew he was no match. The next, his spirit of bravado failed him utterly. He fell back a pace or two and his uplifted arms dropped to his sides. Then he gave vent to a sneering laugh and mockingly cried out:

"Bah! who wants to fight a New Hampshire almshouse beggar?" and turning quickly on his heel he walked away to a group of boys, who, now the ice was broken and the secret out, set up a jeering howl at the youthful champion's expense.

No physical blow could have produced the torture which this hate-poisoned arrow inflicted.

Louis' brilliant color faded out, leaving him

startlingly pale; a look of pain leaped into his eyes and a shiver of repulsion swept over him from head to foot.

Instantly he understood why he had of late been ostracized by his companions: they had, by some means, learned his history previous to his coming to Farmer Weston, and were holding him—some thoughtlessly, others maliciously—disgraced on account of it.

For a moment he was dazed by the unexpected attack. His sorely wounded heart began to swell and throb until it seemed as if it must burst with grief and shame, and in all probability he would have broken down utterly but for the appearance of his teacher, who greeted him with a bright "Good morning, Louis," which partially broke the spell and enabled him to pull himself together somewhat.

Almost mechanically he doffed his hat to her, as he returned her salutation; then turned and walked beside her to the schoolroom, where, slipping quietly into his seat, he tried to face the situation with what courage he might.

But he was wretched; it almost seemed as if he could not remain through the session; as if he must get away somewhere by himself to fight it out alone. His temples were beating like tiny hammers which seemed to emit sparks with every blow; it was with difficulty he could keep his teeth from chattering audibly, and his chin quivered with irrepressible nervousness. He hardly knew when the school was called to order; the opening song fell almost un-

heeded on his ears nor did he even join in the Lord's Prayer until the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," attracted his attention.

This awakened a new train of thought. "Aunt Martha says that means 'love your enemies, do good to them that persecute you,'" he said to himself with a sudden revulsion of feeling and a rush of hot tears over his eyeballs. "Can I ever 'love' Ben Pratt after *that*? Can I ever even be good to him?" he mentally questioned with conflicting emotions.

He was not quite sure just then that he ever could, but the better train of thought once started calmed him somewhat, and by the time the opening exercises were over he was able to begin his morning's work with some degree of composure.

For several days life was made very uncomfortable for him, however, many of the boys, Ben Pratt at their head, neglecting no opportunity to taunt him with his unfortunate past.

This seemed hard enough to bear, but an even more trying test of his courage and principles awaited him, before the conflict with self was to be won, and a malicious foe finally vanquished.

CHAPTER IX

FARMER WESTON was the proud possessor of a beautiful and very valuable colt, which he had raised, and which bade fair to become famous in the near future. His pedigree was beyond criticism, combining the renown and beauty of Hambletonian and Star; and to prove this illustrious ancestry, the admirable points he scored were more than usually fell to the lot of the most carefully bred horseflesh. He was jet black—not a white hair to be found anywhere on his sleek satiny coat. There was not a blemish to be detected in his anatomy. His clear-cut head was almost ideal; his alert, sensitive ears marvels of symmetry, and his beautiful great eyes, set wide apart, were full of fire and intelligence.

Perfect in shape, clean of limb, with a sweeping tail that was the pride of Jerry McLeod's heart, Blackbird—so named by Mrs. Richards during one of her visits home—made a picture to set any true discriminating horseman's heart aflame. He was kept out at pasture when the weather was deemed suitable, and from time to time subjected to careful training by either Mr. Weston or Jerry. He had never yet been regularly harnessed, nor had anyone ever ventured to mount him.

Louis thought he was the finest thing he had ever

seen, and he never allowed a day to elapse without paying a visit to the pasture to feast his eyes upon his beauty and try to make friends with him.

At first he only ventured to sit on the bars and gaze, in wonder and delight, while his frisky coltship, as if conscious of the admiration he was eliciting, cavorted and gamboled in the most graceful and sportive manner, until, becoming accustomed to the presence of the boy, he gradually ventured nearer and nearer the lad, and at last daintily condescended to accept the luscious apple which upon several occasions had been invitingly held out to him.

This was a notable achievement and went on for a week or more, the horse by degrees becoming so friendly he would submit to gentle petting, even appearing to enjoy it and the confidential eulogies which Louis showered upon him. He finally lost all fear of the boy, coming readily at his call, allowing himself to be led about by the mane and manifesting no little affection for his new friend; greeting him joyfully when he appeared in sight and whinnying wistfully when he went away, until one day—he never forgot the proud exhilaration of that moment, albeit something of fear was intermingled—Louis achieved a mount!

This, however, was an unlooked for occurrence—a new experience for Blackbird. He stood motionless for a moment, his graceful head uplifted, his nostrils dilated with mingled astonishment and indignation, in view of such an unwarrantable liberty; the next he bounded off like the wind, kicking up his heels

and executing other marvelous and rather frightful gymnastics in his efforts to rid himself of his unaccustomed burden.

Then there was a struggle to see who would come out ahead. But Louis, with his strong, lithe arms wound close around the slender neck, his knees pressing firmly against his glossy sides, clung for dear life and—conquered; while all the time he talked to his startled steed in a caressing, reassuring voice as they flew around and around the field together.

Gradually, however, Blackbird began to tone down a little. It was a very pleasant, loving, familiar voice that was sounding in his ears, and as he listened, his fear began to abate; his breakneck pace slackened to a brisk trot, then to a gentle amble, and finally, guided by the friend in whom he began to feel returning confidence, he walked decorously up to the bars and obediently stopped at the word of command.

Louis then slipped nimbly to the ground, and drawing a tempting apple from his pocket presented it to his conquered charger, who munched it enjoyably and immediately began to nose around for another.

“Not to-day, you stunning black beauty!” said the boy, his face radiant in view of the signal victory he had won. “Next time, though, you shall have an extra one.”

“‘Next time’ had better be postponed indefinitely, young man,” remarked a quiet but rather stern

voice just behind him, and, turning with a start, Louis found himself face to face with Mr. Weston.

The man had been an almost breathless eye-witness of the daring feat of horsemanship just described, for he had momentarily expected to see the youthful rider dashed to the ground, and maimed or killed, or the colt ruined by a false step or a rolling stone.

He had hurried at once to the pasture; but as he drew near he realized that he might bring about the very catastrophe he dreaded if he appeared too suddenly on the scene or called out sharply to startle the boy who, he saw, was beginning to gain the mastery of the horse; so stepping out of sight behind a tree, he waited with what patience he could command for the circus to come to a finish.

But he heaved a huge sigh of relief when the daring young jockey stood once more on *terra firma* and both boy and horse were unharmed.

Louis colored guiltily as he met the grave eyes of his friend, for not until that moment did it occur to him that he had been taking an unwarrantable liberty. He had long wished that he might help break the colt, and, absorbed in his plans for this result, he had never once thought that he was tampering with another person's property in a very unjustifiable manner.

"Well, you reckless youngster, I'm glad to find you with a whole skin and no bones broken. You won't have very long, if you continue to make a John Gilpin of yourself," Mr. Weston observed in

a tone of would-be reproof; yet Louis' quick ear detected an underlying note of repressed admiration for the daring feat he had performed, and it told him that whatever might be said, for or against, what he had done, the man knew that Blackbird had had a lesson he would never forget; that an important step in his training had been achieved that day.

"I wasn't afraid, sir—after I got on," Louis replied, his eyes glistening again as he recalled the exhilaration of his recent experience.

"Well, *I was*," said the farmer emphatically, "and now, my boy"—speaking very decidedly—"this mustn't occur again. Blackbird is a very valuable piece of horseflesh, and such capers as you two have been cutting up to-day are dangerous for you both. If you don't get your own neck broken you are liable to ruin him, and I want you to give me your word that you'll never mount him again without my permission."

"I won't, sir; I promise," Louis promptly replied, then added apologetically: "I didn't mean to do anything wrong—I thought perhaps I could help to 'break' him."

"Well, maybe you can help; the little scamp seems to like you pretty well," said Farmer Weston, while his glance proudly followed the beautiful creature as he trotted gracefully about the pasture; "but I prefer to have the breaking process conducted under my own eye. I hope you understand, Louis."

"Yes, sir; truly, I never will mount him again

unless you say I may; but can I bring him his apple every day?"

"I have no objection to that or to your being as friendly as you like with him on *terra firma*," the man replied as they turned their steps toward the house.

The next morning Mr. Weston was obliged to leave home for a few days on business of importance.

He returned on Saturday evening, when alas! he was greeted with the startling intelligence that a serious accident had happened to Blackbird during his absence, and he was badly lamed.

"How did it happen?" he demanded sternly of Jerry, who broke the news to him.

"I can't say, sir, just how it happened," said the man in a reserved tone. "When I went to bring him up from the pasture last night, I found him hobbling about on three legs. Walker, the vet., thinks he's slipped his stifle."

Mr. Weston suppressed a groan of despair.

"And you haven't any idea how it was done?" he said.

"Well, sir, if you want an opinion," Jerry returned after a moment of thought, "I believe that boy's been ridin' him again, and he slipped on a rolling stone."

"I don't like to think the boy did it," his master replied; "for he promised me he would not mount him again."

"It's one thing to make a promise, sir, and another to keep it," the man remarked somewhat

shortly, and with the air of one who could tell more if he chose.

Mr. Weston took the lantern from the shelf near him and repaired to the box stall where Blackbird was kept, to see for himself how seriously the horse was injured. When he reappeared he looked very grave and dejected.

"Well, only time will tell," he observed in a spiritless tone as he fastened the door after him.

Turning to replace the lantern on the shelf, he found Louis, attended by Ponce, standing beside him. The boy looked almost ill, and his eyes were red and swollen from crying.

"Mr. Weston," he began tremulously, "I heard what you and Jerry said—I was up on the hay with Ponce—but I didn't lame the colt. I haven't been inside the bars to the pasture since you told me I mustn't ride him again; I've been *to* them and given him his apple and talked to and petted him every day and that is all."

The farmer stood regarding him in thoughtful silence for a moment, while the boy met his gaze fearlessly and without the slightest manifestation of guilt.

"We won't talk about it to-night, Louis," he at length observed; "we'll think it over a while before we discuss it." And with this he abruptly left the barn, going directly into the house.

"Oh, I'm afraid he thinks I did it!" cried Louis disconsolately, as he threw himself upon a box in

which some tools were kept, and dropped his head upon his hands.

"Well—ye *did*, didn't ye? Accordin' to my way o' thinkin' it's pretty poor policy to try to lie out o' a scrape," gruffly remarked Jerry.

Louis sprang to his feet, stung to the quick, his great eyes blazing with mingled pain and indignation. "I'm not lying, Jerry McLeod," he cried passionately; "and you've no right to say that. If I had hurt Blackbird I would have told Mr. Weston I did it—I wouldn't have lied about it, even if I knew he would send me away from here to-morrow for doing what he'd told me not to do."

"Talk is cheap," retorted Jerry with a suggestive shrug of his broad shoulders. "Suppose I should tell ye I *seen* ye ridin' him?"

"Then *you'd* be lying," cried Louis, almost beside himself with grief and anger. "You may say it till—till you're black in the face"—quoting an expression he had heard Nathan Black use—"it will not make it so. *I tell you I didn't* and you're a liar if you say I did."

"Well, sir," and Jerry's tone was blandly exasperating, "I happened to be in the carriage house last night just about dusk. Ye know the east window looks out on the pasture—and I *seen* ye ridin' Blackbird like Jehu——"

"I say you *lie!*" passionately interrupted Louis, losing all control of himself. "If you saw anybody riding Blackbird it was some other boy."

"Well, maybe ye can stick it out; but what I

saw I saw," obstinately affirmed the man. "I didn't tell Mr. Weston on ye, for I thought I'd let ye do yer own confessin'. I started out to get the colt and put a stop to yer fun, but Mis' Weston called me just then, and I had to do something for her; so when I did go for the colt I didn't see any boy, but I found Blackbird hobblin' around on three legs. Ye weren't anywhere around——"

"No; Ponce and I went chestnutting after school and didn't get home till supper time," Louis interposed.

"Ye're a tough one," said Jerry with a short laugh; "but 'twill be better for ye in the end if ye'd make a clean breast of it."

"I tell you I haven't anything to make a clean breast about!—Oh! Ponce," laying his hand on the dog's head, "if you could only speak, *you* could tell."

The boy's voice broke sharply. He could bear no more and, rushing from the barn, fled to his own room, where he threw himself prone upon the bed, sobbing as if his heart would burst.

It was terrible to think of Blackbird being maimed, perhaps for life; but to be accused of having done the deed himself by a deliberate act of disobedience, and made out a liar into the bargain, plunged him into the depths of despair.

It was with a heavy heart Louis went down to breakfast the next day. Mr. Weston bade him a grave "Good morning," but Mrs. Weston smiled cordially and greeted him in her usually cheery manner.

No reference was made to Blackbird; yet this studied avoidance of the one subject so fraught with deep interest to them all engendered a feeling of awkwardness and constraint; and as soon as the meal was over the farmer went directly to the barn, Mrs. Weston busied herself with her household cares and Louis attended to his usual duties.

When the boy was through with his work he went into the sitting-room and, taking up a book, made a pretense of reading, for he did not know what to do with himself. Here Mrs. Weston found him later with volume upside down and a look of misery on his young face that went to her heart.

"You do not seem to be very happy this morning, Louis," she remarked in a kindly tone.

"How can I be?" he returned with a pathetic quiver of his chin. But he shut his teeth together with a resolute snap, for, boy-like, he felt it beneath his dignity to cry in the presence of anyone else, whatever he might do in the privacy of his own chamber.

"You are grieving because of the accident to Blackbird," said Mrs. Weston, a note of sympathy in her tones.

"Yes, and because they think I did it."

"Does it really harm you if some one else believes what is false about you? A million people might believe it, yet, in reality, you would still be perfectly honest and true," returned the woman comfortably.

"But you don't like to have others think or tell lies about you," said Louis, flushing hotly.

"No; that hurts our pride and we begin to pity ourselves because of it—which is only one kind of selfishness, you know—when we should brace up, keep fast hold of our self-respect, do the best we can and then, as Mrs. Richards told you, let God take care of the result."

At this Louis drew in a long, deep breath, which acted something like an escape-valve, for the terrible pressure on his heart was somewhat relieved for the moment.

"Don't *you* believe I did it?" he questioned eagerly.

Mrs. Weston smoothed back the dark hair from his moist forehead while she searched for a moment the wistful eyes fastened upon hers.

"No, Louis, I do not think you are to blame for the injury to Blackbird," she quietly returned.

A flush of joy swept over his face at this assurance; then he grew pale again.

"But Jerry says he *saw* me riding the colt," he said.

"Jerry told you that?" queried his friend in surprise.

"Yes'm." And Louis repeated the conversation that had passed between them in the barn the night before.

Mrs. Weston listened attentively, watching him closely as he talked, and was convinced in spite of all that he was innocent of the wrong laid to his charge.

"Well, dear, it does seem quite a tangle," she

observed when he concluded; "but we will try to be patient and believe it will all come out right," and Louis was inexpressibly comforted by this little confidential talk and her acknowledged faith in him.

Later they went to church together—Mr. Weston feeling justified in remaining at home that morning—and the boy seemed even more cheerful on his return.

After dinner he went out for a walk and almost unconsciously wandered down to the pasture; but alas! there was no Blackbird there to come whinnying joyfully at his call, and he was depressed and wretched again.

He leaned dejectedly against the bars and wondered disconsolately why things had to go at such cross purposes in the world. Why couldn't life run smoothly and everybody be happy?—a problem that has puzzled wiser head than his for ages.

"I'm going to write Aunt Martha all about it and ask her to *pray* for Blackbird," he said, after a thoughtful silence. "I don't see why we shouldn't pray for a horse just the same as for a person when he is sick—such a beautiful, valuable horse, too; it seems as if I never can bear not to have him get well."

He sighed heavily and then went on:

"I wish I didn't have to worry so—I wish I could let *Him* take care of it. I *am* going to try"—resolutely. "If He is omnipotent, then I haven't got anything to do with it."

The cloud lifted somewhat from his brow with

this philosophical reasoning; then presently there came another troublesome thought in connection with Jerry.

He knew that the man had never liked him very well, for some reason, although he had tried hard to please him. Jerry had been short and surly with him from the first, but had never manifested quite so much ill-will as last evening. Louis' feeling against him had been very bitter since their talk, but now he began to be conscience-smitten because he had said such sharp things to him in return. He had forgotten, in his excitement, that it is the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

"I've got to make that right," he said, after thinking it over. "It makes no difference what *he* thinks or says, I'd no business to talk that way to him. I guess I'll go and have it out with him now."

He was on the point of putting his resolution in force when something on the top rail of the bars attracted his attention.

"What's that?" he said bending for a closer look.

"That" was a small piece of woolen cloth that had caught under a splinter and had evidently been torn from some garment worn by a person who had been on the fence. Louis carefully detached it, smoothed it out and critically examined it, his eyes growing big, his heart beating rapidly from the thoughts that went flashing with lightning speed through his brain.

"I'm just going to keep this," he asserted under his breath; "and some day perhaps I shall find the

fellow who wears a suit like it. I'll bet it belongs to the boy who rode Blackbird."

He plunged his hand into a pocket and brought forth his pocketbook—Mr. Richards' gift to him on going away—and having with great care placed the fragment in the middle compartment, which had a clasp, he turned his steps homeward, feeling not quite so hopeless as when he had started forth upon his walk.

CHAPTER X

LOUIS went straight to the barn as soon as he reached home. Jerry was in the harness-room, carefully putting away the best harness, which was only used for church-going and other special occasions, giving it a rub here and there to remove all dust and possible finger-marks from leather and mountings.

He gave the boy a curious look as he entered, then again became absorbed in his work while he vigorously whistled the refrain to an old Scotch hymn by way of accompaniment.

"Can't I help, Jerry?" Louis inquired, to break the ice and get down to business.

"I've done it alone f'r fifteen years; guess I c'n keep on a while longer," was the ungracious response, while the whistling was resumed with incisive shrillness.

Louis felt exceedingly uncomfortable; stuck his hands in his pockets; stood first on one foot then the other and grew hot and cold by turns. He had set himself a disagreeable task and did not quite know how to begin.

"I say, Jerry," he finally blurted out with a very red face, "I said some mean things to you last night, and I don't feel very good after thinking them over."

He paused to give his companion an opportunity to make some reply, but the man, although he ceased whistling, preserved an obstinate silence and a face as expressionless as a mask.

"I'd no business to call you a liar," Louis resumed; "but I was awful mad and didn't care what I said. I'm not mad now, though; I'm only sorry, and I—I'd like to make up."

"'Make up!'" repeated the man, giving him a withering look. "D'ye think I'm goin' to take sides with ye on this colt business and keep still about what I saw ye up to?"

"Oh, no; I expect you will tell Mr. Weston what you told me last night," Louis replied, but shrinking under the man's scorn. "That is not what I mean at all—I'm just sorry that I was rude to you and I want to be friends."

"Humph!" slightly grunted the Scotchman.

"You haven't seemed to like me very well since I came here, Jerry, though I don't know why," the boy went on. "Perhaps I don't do things as you like to have them done, but if you'll tell me how I can do better, I'll try."

Jerry now began to feel decidedly uncomfortable, but to conceal the fact he polished on with redoubled vigor. Possessing his full share of the proverbial Scotch obstinacy, it would have been a severe wrench to his pride to have "made friends" on such short notice, even if he had not been so sore over Blackbird's mishap and firmly believed that Louis had been the cause of it. Yet he was not a bad man at heart,

and underneath his apparently adamant exterior he was really touched by the boy's pathetic appeal, although under existing circumstances his rigid ideas of justice forbade his manifesting it in the slightest degree.

"Guess we'll wait till ye're ready to do the square thing by Mr. Weston," he doggedly responded, as he turned to hang up the resplendent collar upon which he had expended such unusual attention; whereupon Louis, feeling decidedly *de trop* and that his efforts as peacemaker had been anything but "blessed," slipped dejectedly out of the room and went back to the house.

As he entered the sitting-room Mr. Weston laid down the book he had been reading and gravely, yet not unkindly, observed:

"Louis, I would like you to tell me just what you know about Blackbird's accident."

"I don't know anything about how he was hurt," the boy returned. "I wasn't here when Jerry brought him up, for Ponce and I went chestnutting after school, Friday, and didn't get home till most supper time. Hannah told me about the colt when I came in."

"And did you not go to the pasture at all, Friday?" inquired the farmer.

"Oh, yes, sir; I was there after dinner—I took him his apple when I went back to school. He was all right then."

"And you haven't been on his back——"

"No, sir, not since you told me I must not mount

him," Louis interrupted, his voice tremulous with his eagerness to establish his honesty.

Mr. Weston sat silent for a few moments. Then he said very seriously:

"If that horse doesn't get well he will be a great loss to me; but I think that would not hurt me nearly so much as to lose faith in somebody I thought a good deal of——"

"I know you mean me, sir," Louis again interposed, and wondering how much longer he could endure this trying ordeal; "and I know Jerry thinks I'm to blame. He says he saw me riding Blackbird, though he wouldn't tell you because he thought I ought to confess it. But it wasn't me he saw; I can't prove it, for Ponce is the only one in the world besides me who knows it, and he can't talk," he concluded despairingly.

Mr. Weston was impressed, yet did not feel quite convinced that the boy was speaking the exact truth.

"Well," he remarked, after another thoughtful pause, "I think we will leave the matter just here, Louis, and trust that time will clear up what now seems to be a very mysterious affair. And you are not to feel yourself under a ban, either, for anything that your own conscience does not accuse you of; we will simply drop it and go as before."

This conclusion comforted Louis somewhat, although it was not what he craved by any means; nevertheless he was grateful to Mr. Weston for the justice he had manifested, and resolved that he would patiently await further developments.

Before he slept, however, he poured out his whole heart in a letter to Aunt Martha, and knew that, ere many days elapsed, he would receive a reply which would both cheer and strengthen him. The next morning he started for school, feeling more like himself, for everybody—Jerry excepted—treated him the same as usual, thus proving that he was to be regarded innocent of wrong until proven guilty. And he was also destined to be established on a better footing with his class that day, although the experience was to be attended by some bitterness and humiliation.

As he entered the playground a few moments before the bell rang, one of the boys—a crony of Ben Pratt—yelled out at the top of his lungs: “Here’s that New Hampshire beggar again.”

But the words were scarcely uttered when the offender found himself firmly clutched by the shoulder, while the stern voice of his teacher ominously demanded:

“What do you mean, Henry Jones, by speaking of Louis like that?”

“All the boys do,” muttered the crestfallen culprit with a frightened gasp.

“All?”

“Well, a lot of ’em do.”

“But why?—why are you so cruel to a class-mate?”

“’Cause—he was a pauper and came from a poor-house;” and the shamefaced offender guiltily hung his head.

"Shame upon you!—never let me hear it from your lips again," said Miss Morton severely, and looking both indignant and resolute.

When the opening exercises were over, she sent Louis with a note to another teacher telling him to wait for an answer. As soon as the door closed after him Miss Morton arose and sternly faced her class.

"I have something to say to the boys in this grade," she gravely began. "I have learned that some of you are doing Louis Arnold a great wrong, and I warn you if I know of the insult being repeated I will send the offender directly to Mr. Rollins to be dealt with. And let me tell you, Louis' father was a gentleman—the principal of a high school, and his mother was a lovely, cultured woman. Furthermore, I wish you to know that Mr. William Richards of Chicago—I don't need to tell you who he is—is Louis' guardian; and, under his care, it is safe to say that he is likely to fare as well in the future as any one of you. Apart from all this, I am deeply pained to know that any members of my class could be so unkind as to taunt another with what he was in no way responsible for and what might have been your lot under similar circumstances. Now you may take your books."

During recess there was quite a flutter of excitement among the pupils of the eighth grade, in view of what they had learned, and one curious youth waylaid Louis and confidentially inquired:

"I say, Louis, is it true that Mr. Richards is your guardian?"

"Yes, why?"

"Miss Morton said so this morning, after you went upstairs. She gave us 'Hail Columbia' because we'd been calling you names. What is a guardian anyway?"

"Well, I guess it means that he is to look after me until I am twenty-one, the same as your father takes care of you," Louis replied.

"Oh, then you kind of belong to him; and he's awful rich too, isn't he?" said the youth, as if deeply impressed.

"I don't know."

"Well, he is; I heard my father say he's got *piles* of money."

Louis did not appear to be at all elated in view of this information; at least he made no response to it.

"Where's Ben Pratt?" he inquired irrelevantly, for Ben had not put in an appearance that day.

"He's sick—had a fall the other day and cut his head."

"Bad?"

"Well, Jim Brown said the doctor had to sew it up."

On his way home from school that afternoon Louis slipped round to the Pratt home to inquire for Ben.

Mrs. Pratt, a tired-looking woman, came to the door with a baby in her arms.

"I'm Louis Arnold, and I've come to ask how Ben is," he said, as he politely took off his hat to her.

"He is better than he was yesterday; but still in bed. Would you like to come in and see him?" Mrs. Pratt returned. Louis hesitated; he was not quite sure that he would be a welcome visitor. He wished to show that he held no grudge against the sick boy and had taken this way to do it.

"I'll come in to-morrow afternoon if he would like to have me," he said after thinking a moment, adding heartily: "I'm glad he is better."

"Thank you for coming to ask after him," said Mrs. Pratt appreciatively.

The next day, about the same hour, he again presented himself at the door, bearing a well-filled paper bag in one hand, and was cordially greeted by Mrs. Pratt.

"You are the only boy who has called to see Benny," she said, "and he told me to let you go right up. You will find him in the first room on the left."

With rising color Louis mounted to the second floor, found the room designated, and Ben, bolstered up in bed, looking rather pale and with a towel bound about his head.

"Hello!" said the invalid by way of greeting, but with some embarrassment, as he met Louis' smiling glance.

"Hello, Ben! I've brought you some chestnuts," responded Louis, going to the boy's side and depositing his generous offering—half of what he had gathered the previous Friday—before him.

"Chestnuts! that's bully!" was the eager re-

joinder. "I've hardly seen one this year—was goin' myself last Saturday, but couldn't. These are busters!" he added, drawing forth a handful. "Where'd you get 'em?"

"On the hill back of the farm. I got about two quarts, last Friday, after school."

"Friday; that was the day I cracked my head open," and Ben made a grimace as his wound gave him a twinge.

"Shall you go back to school this week?" Louis asked.

"I don't know; I shall if I can, 'cause it's blamed lonesome here, shut up in the house; but I get dizzy when I try to walk."

They chatted a while of various matters interesting to both, until Louis arose and said it was time for him to be getting home.

"I hope you'll be all right in a day or two," he said at parting.

"If I don't show up by Thursday, will you come again?" Ben pleaded with a conscious flush.

"If—you want me to," said Louis, with a note of doubt in his tone.

"All right; I do, and you're good to bring me half of your chestnuts—there must be a quart here," said the boy.

Ben did not "show up" at school on Thursday and, true to his promise, Louis went to see him again. This time he took a game that had been given him the previous Christmas and they spent quite a social hour playing together, though he thought

the boy did not seem as well as during his former visit.

While they were thus engaged Mrs. Pratt came into the room, looking quite disturbed.

"Benny, how did you tear your new jacket like this?" she inquired, holding up a sleeve from which a piece had been torn completely out.

"Oh, I caught it getting over a fence," the boy indifferently replied and without turning from his game.

"But where is the piece?" demanded his mother.

"I didn't think anything about the piece," was the impatient retort. "Go on Louis—it's your turn."

"It is too bad, Benny; this new jacket! and I have nothing that will match it," sighed Mrs. Pratt wearily. "If I had the piece I could darn it in so it would never show; now it will have to be patched with something else. You are very careless, Benny, with your clothes and I try so hard to keep you looking nice," and with this reproof the much-tried mother left the room.

The moment Louis saw the hole in the jacket, his heart gave a tremendous bound, while he involuntarily thrust one hand into his pocket and grasped his pocketbook. The fragment of cloth which lay in its inner compartment was exactly like that of the garment!

His first impulse had been to produce it so that Mrs. Pratt could mend the hole nicely. Then came the thought: "How could he explain where he had found it without involving Ben in trouble?" For

he was very sure now that Ben was the boy who had ridden and lamed the colt and that his injured head was the price he had paid for that ride.

What should he do about it? He had come to see Ben because he was shut in, and he wanted to "do good" to his "persecutor"; and now he had discovered something which might make an even more bitter foe of him if he revealed it. His heart was very heavy, and his temples throbbed painfully; but, in justice to himself, he felt that he must have it out with him before he left.

"What are you thinking about?" Ben suddenly demanded, as Louis seemed to have forgotten the game.

"About your jacket," he replied, flushing crimson.

"Darn the jacket!" said Ben irritably. "What a fuss over a little hole—though I do hate patches," he concluded, scowling.

Louis felt this was his opportunity. He drew forth his pocketbook and taking the bit of cloth from its inner compartment laid it on the coverlid before his companion.

"There's the piece, and she can darn it in," he briefly observed.

Ben regarded the frayed scrap in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Where'd *you* get *that*?" he asked.

"'Twas caught on the upper rail of the bars to the pasture where we keep the colt," Louis explained.

Then as Ben looked conscious he bluntly queried:

"Did *you* ride Blackbird last Friday? Jerry saw some one on his back and declares it was I. But it wasn't, for I'd gone chestnutting. Did you get a spill? Was that how you hurt your head?" Louis demanded excitedly.

Ben laughed uneasily; then meeting Louis' eager eyes he burst out defiantly:

"What if I did? Nobody's hurt but me. I saw you ridin' him one day and thought I'd risk a turn myself. I tore my jacket getting over the bars. That's a dandy colt, though. I had a jolly ride till he stumbled and threw me off and I cut my head on a stone. I thought I was killed at first, but I crawled over the wall and lay down till I stopped seein' stars, then came home. You needn't look so glum about it, though," he concluded as he observed his visitor's troubled face.

"The colt was hurt, as well as you," said Louis gravely. "He was lamed and we're afraid he is ruined."

"Gosh!" ejaculated the sick boy in a frightened voice. Then he added with a quick, indrawn breath and a white face: "Say, Louis, you won't blab?"

"But Mr. Weston and Jerry think *I* did it," said Louis, looking the boy straight in the eyes.

Ben fell limply back among his pillows.

"I vow! that's downright mean! to go back on a sick fellow after getting it out of him this way!"

"I didn't 'get it out' of you, Ben; you told me of your own accord, and you ought to tell Mr. Weston

yourself, and not let him blame me for it," returned our hero with commendable spirit.

"Then my father'll have to pay for the colt and he—he can't afford to," whimpered Ben timorously.

Louis' face fell. He knew that the Pratts were by no means in affluent circumstances—that, indeed, they had to struggle for a living, and he recalled how worried Mrs. Pratt looked.

"Perhaps Blackbird will get over it, then he wouldn't have to be paid for," he tried to say encouragingly.

Ben caught eagerly at this straw of hope.

"Well, wait till I get better—promise you won't say a word till I'm well," he pleaded so plaintively and looked so white and wretched that Louis' heart was touched.

"All right, I'll wait," he said stoically as he got up to go, feeling that he must get away by himself to battle with the sense of injustice and resentment that would assert itself, in spite of his desire to be good to a boy who was sick.

A little later Mrs. Pratt on going to her son's room found him crying bitterly, a circumstance that surprised her greatly, for he had always been a turbulent boy with, apparently, no softer side to his nature; and he had seldom shed tears to her knowledge.

"What is the matter, dear?" she questioned anxiously.

"My head hurts," said the boy, as he hid his face in the pillow.

The next day when Louis went to school he heard that Ben was very ill with brain fever.

Then there followed several weeks of suspense in connection with both the colt and Ben, for if the latter did not recover Louis felt that he could never prove his innocence of the injury to Blackbird.

Meantime, however, he received a most comforting letter from Aunt Martha, who charged him not to worry, for she believed that the truth would some time be revealed.

"But if it never is," she wrote, "you can, in time, *live* down the suspicions against you by invariable honesty and obedience in the future. But I know *now* that my boy is true blue."

A little later Blackbird began to show signs of improvement, and by the end of the fourth week he was so much better, Mr. Weston announced, to Louis' exceeding joy, he had great hopes that, eventually, he would be as sound as ever.

"If he gets well, I guess I can bear all the rest, so I'm not going to fret over it any more," Louis said to himself, out of the fullness of his thankful heart.

About a week after this Ben Pratt sent for him again. Louis had heard that he was getting slowly better, but did not suppose he was well enough to see visitors. He was quite shocked, however, when he was ushered into his presence. Could that be Ben Pratt—that wasted figure lying upon the bed, his face almost as white as the pillow on which he rested; his cheeks sunken, his hands like claws? But

his eyes were bright and clear, and he nodded a smiling welcome to his guest as he entered.

"You're better, Ben, and I'm glad," Louis cordially observed as he moved quietly across the room and sat down beside him.

"Yes, I'm lots better and so hungry all the time. I can't get enough to eat. But I've had a tough time, Louis—see!" and he held up a trembling hand that looked almost transparent in the light. "How's the colt?" he eagerly inquired with the next breath.

"Oh, he is getting along all right."

"Is he going to get well?" cried Ben with trembling lips.

"We hope so—we are almost sure he is," returned Louis with comforting assurance.

"By—no, I won't say it," the boy interposed, as he caught the look of disapproval in his visitor's eyes. "I said if I got well I'd try to stop swearin'; but, truly, I'm almost too glad about the colt to bear it," and his voice broke from mingled joy and weakness. "Have—you told?" he questioned, as soon as he recovered himself a little.

Louis shook his head, but colored violently as he did so.

"Truly?" persisted Ben, searching his face anxiously.

"Course I haven't—I promised, you know."

Ben regarded him wonderingly for a moment. He very well knew that he could never have kept such a secret and borne the blame and suspicion which had fallen upon Louis. Suddenly his eyes wavered

and fell. He felt embarrassed and ashamed before such integrity.

"You're O. K.," he finally remarked with a faint attempt at pleasantry.

"It's always O. K. to do what you know it's right to do," Louis gravely replied, and hoping Ben would now release him from his promise and set him right with Mr. Weston. But, evidently, he had no intention of doing so, for he presently changed the subject, and Louis, deeply hurt, very soon took his leave.

When Ben returned to school, while he was civil to Louis, he did not seek his companionship; on the contrary, he rather avoided him. But he was changed in many ways. He no longer bullied the small boys; he was more studious, and respectful to his teacher, while a profane word seldom escaped his lips.

Yet he did not seem quite happy; instead of being a leader in the roughest sports as he once had been, he would now often wander off by himself at recess, or sit quietly watching the various games, especially when Louis was in the playground.

This went on for some time, the two boys seldom coming in contact, while Louis had about given up all hope that Ben would ever "do the square thing" by him.

One stormy Saturday, after a long, tedious day picking over apples with Jerry, who had been unusually surly, Mrs. Weston asked him if he would do the errands uptown for her, as Mr. Weston, not feeling well, did not like to go out in the storm.

Louis was only too glad of the opportunity, and

set off, whistling merrily, and with Ponce for company.

His errands done he stopped at the post office, where he found an unusually large budget of papers and letters, after which he and Ponce made quick time back to get in out of the storm, and entered the cheerful, homelike kitchen just as Hannah was dishing up the fragrant baked beans and brown bread for supper.

He took the mail in to Mr. Weston, then went to make himself ready for the table.

The first letter the farmer opened and read caused the hot color to mount into his face, and a peculiar expression to come into his eyes and settle about his mouth.

Presently turning to his wife he held out the missive to her, remarking with visible agitation:

“Mother, I have something rather interesting here, if you would like to read it.”

Wondering what interesting news could so disquiet her husband, Mrs. Weston took the letter and read it.

Tears streamed over her cheeks before she had half perused it, and the following is a copy of the absorbing, though decidedly faulty, document that caused this emotion:

MR. WESTON: i'v got something to tell you. Louis didn't lame your colt. i done it and i'm glad he aint spoiled after all. i rid him that day and he didn't like it for a cent, but i stuck til he stumbled and pitched me off, my head was cut open and i've

ben orful sick since. Louis found out how i got hurt and promised he wouldn't tell while i was sick—guess he haint told yet, but i know it aint fair so i'm telling myself. i've told Pa and he's goin to write you a letter, i'm sorry.

BEN PRATT.

"Louis, dear boy, is all right. I've felt from the first that he told the truth about Blackbird; and he has been so brave and patient through it all!" said Mrs. Weston, as she refolded Ben's letter and wiped her tears.

"He has indeed," heartily responded her husband, "and I feel condemned now for not having had absolute faith in him; but Jerry was so positive about what he saw, the evidence against him seemed pretty strong."

A few minutes later when Louis came into the room he observed:

"Here is a letter I want you to read. Ben Pratt has told me the whole story about the colt."

"Ben has told you!" Louis repeated, his eyes growing big and bright, his whole face radiant. "Gee—whiz! but I began to be afraid he'd never do the square thing. Whew! if I was out of doors I'd yell so he'd hear me in town, I'm so glad," and the boy could hardly keep from dancing with joy, so elated was he by this happy and unexpected ending of all his recent troubles; while, as he read the letter, it seemed to him the most important epistle that was ever penned in spite of small i's, bad spelling and faulty phraseology.

"How long have you known that Ben was the guilty one?" Mr. Weston inquired, smiling in sympathy with his joy.

"I found it out the next Thursday after Blackbird was hurt," he replied, and then related how and where he had discovered the scrap of cloth which had been torn from Ben's jacket, and their talk about it afterwards during the call upon him.

"That was not quite fair to yourself, my boy, to promise to keep such a secret," said the farmer when the story was told.

"Well, but he was sick; and a fellow doesn't want to be hard on another when he is down," Louis modestly affirmed.

"Were you never going to tell me about it?" inquired his friend.

"What would have been the use? After I'd given him the piece of cloth there was nothing to prove he did it, and I—I thought perhaps it would be taken care of, some way, if I did the best I could," the lad explained with some embarrassment, while he thoughtfully traced a figure on the carpet with the toe of his slipper.

Mr. Weston's face was a study as he listened.

"Well, my son," he observed, in a voice that was a trifle husky, after a moment of silence, "if you govern all your future life with such absolute faith and unswerving principle, you'll have ballast that will steady your craft into a safe harbor at last. There are older people who would do well to emulate your example, Louis, and I am happy and proud

to have such a boy in my home. Now"—as the supper bell rang—"let us top off with baked beans and brown bread;" and with a jovial laugh that was echoed by both his wife and Louis, the farmer led the way to the dining-room.

After the meal was over he went to the barn and told Jerry the whole story.

"Eh!—the Pratt boy!—by *gum*!" That was all he said about it, but there was a sparkle of malicious enjoyment in Mr. Weston's eyes as the man leaped to his feet and began to stalk nervously around the barn, going aimlessly from one stall to another and finally disappearing within Blackbird's box, shutting the door after himself with a resounding bang.

But the farmer knew Jerry was completely upset and wanted to fight it out alone, so he quietly went back to the house, feeling pretty sure that this volcanic eruption would be productive of clearer skies and fairer weather in the future for Louis.

Sunday afternoon, about stock-feeding time, the boy strolled out to the barn. He loved every creature in it and liked to be around among them, even though of late Jerry had been so disaffected he would not allow him to do anything except what Mr. Weston ordered him to do.

He looked up rather sheepishly as Louis entered. Then suddenly bracing up he remarked in a confidential tone:

"Say, Louis, I'm in a hurry to get off to-night; want to help?"

"Course I'd like to help, Jerry. What'll I do?"

“S’pose—you feed ‘the bird’ and bed him down, and I’ll ’tend to the other critters,” said the man with unprecedented complaisance; for the care of Blackbird at night had become to him almost a religious rite in which no one else was allowed to participate.

This unlooked-for manifestation of good-will almost floored Louis; but there was a whole chapter of meaning in it for him, and it was with difficulty he repressed a wild whoop of triumph over another conquered foe as, with a matter-of-fact “All right,” he slipped softly in beside the colt who greeted him with his old affectionate whinny. But here he had to let off steam, and throwing his arms about Blackbird’s graceful neck he buried his face in his glossy mane and gave him a vigorous hug as he gleefully whispered:

“We’ve trolled a long time to catch that fish, haven’t we, you black beauty? But I guess we’ve landed him all right at last.” And this was true, for during all his after life he had no more loyal and devoted friend than Jerry McLeod.

We cannot follow our hero, in detail, through all the experiences of his home and school life. It must suffice to say that he grew to be more and more like a son to good Farmer Weston and his wife. He made steady progress in his studies and entered the high school two years after becoming a member of their family. Here he also won many friends among his classmates as well as “golden opinions” from his teachers; and so time sped on.

He had just started on his senior year, when, one

morning, on entering the school-building he suddenly came face to face with a new scholar—a young girl of perhaps fifteen years. She was dressed all in black; her long, glittering braid of golden hair was tied with a great bow of black ribbon, while a hat of the same sombre hue surmounted a fair face that was like a delicately-carved cameo.

“I beg pardon,” said Louis, doffing his cap, as he courteously stepped aside to allow her to pass.

The next moment his heart gave a great startled bound as, after his observing eyes had swept the beautiful face a second time, he recognized an old acquaintance.

“She is—Gipsy!” he breathed, amazed, and turned to watch the graceful figure as the girl, all unconscious of the conflicting emotions she had aroused in the heart of “that stunning-looking fellow,” walked on toward the dressing-room to remove her coat and hat before going to her class-room.

CHAPTER XI.

LOUIS was so excited over his startling discovery and the distracting presence of the new scholar, it was with difficulty he could settle down to his work that morning, while he was all on the *qui vive* to learn something about her—her name and how she happened to appear upon the scene so unexpectedly, and, most wonderful of all, at her age a senior in the high school.

During recess his curiosity was somewhat appeased upon learning that the name of the new pupil was Margaret Churchill Lawrence, and throughout the remainder of the day he frequently found himself studying the face of its owner to ascertain, if possible, whether the somewhat high-sounding cognomen fitted her nicely. He thought, on the whole, it did, although perhaps a few years later she might be better able to support the dignity of it.

She had changed much during the five years that had elapsed since their meeting.

She had been a dear little fairy at that time, a sweet-tempered child, bubbling over with buoyant happiness and spirits. Now she had spun up into a tall slip of a girl, who bade fair to be very lovely a few years later, and had acquired an air and bearing that was entirely different from the Gipsy who

had been so light-hearted and care-free on the day of their first meeting at the county fair.

Louis felt almost sure that she must have known some recent sorrow which had saddened her, for there was a grieved look about her eyes and a pathetic droop to the sweet lips; then, too, her black dress and ribbons were suggestive. All the same, he thought she was very winsome, and he was impatient to make her acquaintance.

He wondered if she would be glad to get back her pretty ring, which, however, would be much too small for her now, and which he still carefully preserved with his mother's wedding ring in a small compartment of a beautiful writing-desk which Mrs. Richards had added to the furnishings of his room during a recent visit home.

The next day while he was chatting with Charlie Osgood and Nellie Evarts, two other classmates and friends, Margaret Lawrence's name was mentioned, when Nellie said she had met her, adding with girlish impulsiveness:

"And she is just as sweet and lovely as she looks."

"Is she one of the—ahem!—*swell* kind?" queried Charlie Osgood with an indescribable air and smirk.

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Nellie.

"Oh, you know. One of the Josephine Ashton kind;" and he gave his head a haughty toss, bestowing a cold, supercilious stare upon her, in ludicrous imitation of the proud daughter of the millionaire of the town.

"Fie, you naughty boy! Josephine isn't half so

bad as that, when you come to know her," said the young girl, in stout defense of her absent class-mate.

"She is very different from you, anyhow, Nellie. I can't endure the swish-swash of her silks and satins; and the glare of her diamonds makes me mad. Girls have no business to dress like that for school. Now *you* are sensible"—running his eye approvingly over her trim figure in its simple blue serge suit—"and I'll bet Miss Lawrence is too; she looks as neat as a new pin."

"Thank you, Charlie, for myself; and doubtless Miss Lawrence would also appreciate the compliment from such high authority," Nellie laughingly returned, and flushing slightly, for Charlie Osgood, in her estimation, was about the nicest, if not *the* very finest boy in the class.

"But does she live on the North or the South side?" he pursued mischievously, "for if she isn't located on the South, in a three-story swell front house with an *observatory* and a *conservatory* and all that, she can't be in our set, you know."

Now, the "North side" and the "South side" meant a great deal in that beautiful suburb of Boston. A lovely stream divided the town into two sections, the southern, or newer, swell portion, stretching away up on the hills, and bristling with fine residences; and the north part, which had once been thought very nice, but was now looked down upon, in more senses than one, by its would-be aristocratic neighbors.

"Charlie appears to be in a sarcastic mood this morning," Louis here interposed.

"Well, you see, I'm interested in the new scholar," he returned with twinkling eyes but with mock anxiety. "She looks O. K. to me, but if she isn't located right, you know, she cannot swing in our circle. *We*," assuming a pompous air and inflating his chest, "live in a rarefied atmosphere, consequently, under such superior conditions, it is natural we should dilate, inflate, swell; while those poor mortals down yonder are of no earthly account, because fashion has set a dividing line, and decrees—'thus far and no farther.' Faugh!"

"You are too ridiculous, Charlie," said Nellie, laughing; "though I know as well as you do that it is perfectly absurd to assume that people on this side of the river are of more account simply because they have more money, live in nicer houses, and real estate is valued higher."

"Just as if houses or land could make any essential difference in the people who own them, or money could buy either brains or character!" Louis here quietly observed, but with a scornful curl of his lips that spoke volumes.

"It is all bosh," said Charlie impatiently; "but there's a lot of that feeling in the town, and in the school, too; and I'm disgusted with it."

Then it will not shock either of you to learn that the Lawrences live on the North side," remarked Nellie with a twinkle of mischief in her bright eyes, "and I'm afraid they are rather poor. Margaret's

father died about a year ago; she has a brother in Harvard, and she and her mother came here to live to be near him. They've taken the Rand cottage on Morse Street. I've heard, though, that they used to have a great deal of money, and they say that Margaret is a great scholar. She must be to be in our class, for she is only fifteen."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Charlie in surprise, while Louis flushed slightly, but said nothing.

"I think she is splendid, and I'm going to cultivate her—" began Nellie.

"In spite of the North side and the Rand cottage," interposed Charlie with a chuckle. "You have pluck, Nell!"

"Thank you; and since you are also so democratic I shall expect you to stand by me," she flashed back, then added roguishly: "There she comes now; brace up and I'll introduce you."

Louis gave a start of eagerness, for he most earnestly desired a formal introduction to Miss Lawrence. Charlie, on the other hand, being a trifle shy of strangers, flushed to his eyes and began to edge off when, chancing to glance behind him, his bashfulness was superseded by an amusing effort to "brace up" and stand his ground.

"Oh, yes, do," he cried with a deepening flush, "for there comes Jo. Ashton herself—"

"With rings on her fingers and *p'raps* on her toes,
Always in silks and satins wherever she goes,"

he paraphrased. "I'd rather face a dozen new girls

any day than to run against her imperial highness in all that toggery."

And so, to escape the richest girl in town, bashful Charlie Osgood allowed himself to be introduced to Miss Lawrence, and really bore himself very creditably.

When Louis was presented to her, Margaret started slightly and gave him a searching look.

"Are you—" she began impulsively, after acknowledging the introduction, then cut herself short and blushed for having so nearly reminded him of something which might be unpleasant to recall; for this manly, handsome, well-dressed fellow did not look as if he could ever have been the forlorn little tramp whom she had met at the county fair, five years ago.

Louis understood and smiled frankly into her eyes.

"Yes, I'm the same boy who rescued your flying hat that day up in New Hampshire," he said, adding: "and it is rather queer, isn't it, that we should now find ourselves here in the same school together?"

"Yes, indeed it is, and I have often wondered what became of you," Margaret replied. "We tried to find you again that day, but you had disappeared. Papa was going to ask you to go home with us."

"So you are old acquaintances!" exclaimed Nellie Evarts in surprise. "Well, wonders will never cease!"

A moment or two later she and Charlie turned to speak to some other classmates, when Louis, drawing nearer his companion, remarked in a low tone:

"Miss Lawrence, the bag of candy you gave me upon that occasion proved to be a more valuable gift than you dreamed of, I imagine."

Margaret looked perplexed, and Louis smilingly continued:

"I was very economical with its contents, for I did not know when I would have any more, so it was three weeks later when I came to my last chocolate cream and found something, which I am sure you did not intend to give me, almost buried in it—it was this."

He produced a tiny box as he spoke and handed it to her. He had slipped it into his pocket that morning, thinking he would give it to her the first opportunity that offered.

With a look of wonder Margaret lifted the cover, to find her long-lost ring reposing upon a bed of snowy cotton.

"Oh! my ring!" she cried joyfully, instantly recognizing it. Then the hot tears rushed into her eyes, almost blinding her. "Papa gave it to me that very day—it was my birthday gift, and I was heart-broken over losing it," she explained with tremulous lips.

"I tried to find you a little later and restore it," Louis observed, and then described his visit to, and interview with, the postmaster, and how disappointed he had been over his failure.

"I am so glad to have it again, though it is too small now for any finger, except my little one," said the girl, regarding it fondly. "It was my first ring

with a setting; and, though I have had several others since, not one has ever seemed quite so fine. I thank you more than I can tell you for taking such nice care of it."

"You cannot be more glad than I that its owner has it back again," said Louis; "and now I'd like to ask about your brother."

"Oh, Ted?—he is in Harvard, a junior, and is trying to work his own way through college," Margaret explained, flushing slightly as she thus frankly referred to the change in her circumstances. "We lost papa last year," she went on with an effort. "He had had a lot of trouble for a couple of years, and it wore him out; but Ted was so well started in his course, papa made him promise he would try and go through. He finds it pretty hard, though; but he is brave and a good worker, and I'm sure he will win out," she concluded with a glow of sisterly pride.

"Our home used to be in Lawrence," she presently resumed—"the city was named, years ago, for one of papa's ancestors—but we always spent our summers in New Hampshire, so that is how we happened to be at the county fair that day. After we lost papa, our home had to be sold; so mamma and I came here to live, in order to be near Ted."

"I am sure you will like it here," Louis hastened to say, for this reference to her old home had seemed to sadden her. "Everybody thinks this is a beautiful town."

Then he told her something of his own experiences during the last five years, and they chatted socially

until the bell rang, then walked to the building together, feeling very much like old acquaintances reunited.

Margaret Lawrence very soon became friendly with most of her class, even though she made no pretense of being other than she was—a girl who was fitting herself to be a teacher because she would have her own living to earn in the future. Josephine Ashton and a few others, however, openly ignored her after ascertaining her social standing, simply giving her a cold stare and a frigid bow whenever they chanced to meet.

Kind-hearted Nellie Evarts tried to excuse Josephine's treatment by explaining that her father was a millionaire; that she lived in the finest residence in town, and had everything she wanted.

"Is she a good scholar?" Margaret inquired, and without appearing to be very deeply impressed by the account of the girl's wealth and position.

"First-rate; she almost always leads the class, but when anyone happens to go to the front I tell you her head goes up higher than ever, and woe be to the offender."

Margaret made no response to this, but the lines about her mouth settled a little more firmly, and the sweet blue eyes grew darker and brighter from some secret thought.

It was not very long before the ambitious ones in the class became conscious that they would have to work even more diligently in order to retain the laurels which they had already won; for the new

scholar soon proved herself to be an exceptionally brilliant student. Every lesson was thoroughly prepared; her recitations were well-nigh perfect, Professor Allyn not unfrequently expressing commendation of her proficiency in this respect.

In mathematics she was almost a prodigy—"a mathematical wonder," Charlie Osgood called her one day in the hearing of Josephine Ashton, who had grown very jealous of her.

"Oh, dear! I'm tired to death hearing that Lawrence girl's praises sounded upon every occasion—do give us a rest," she petulantly exclaimed.

"But just think of it," persisted the boy with a touch of malice. "She is only fifteen years old, and yet those knotty algebra problems seem as simple as the multiplication table to her. I tell you, she's the smartest girl I ever saw," he concluded admiringly.

"Humph! you don't suppose for a minute that she does all those problems and gets the correct answers without any outside help, do you?" sharply demanded Miss Ashton.

"Why, yes, of course I do," Charlie positively affirmed.

"She says she does," Nellie Evarts here interposed. "She told me that her father used to coach her in mathematics, but made her reason everything out for herself; and besides, she likes that study better than any other."

"Fudge! I'll bet she gets help from some one," excitedly retorted Josephine, who found the discus-

sion getting too warm for her, and who forgot that it is not lady-like to bet.

A few days later there was a very difficult lesson in algebra, embracing three or four unusually hard problems to be solved, and there were many clouded brows and anxious faces in the class when the hour for recitation arrived.

Mr. Allyn began to assign the work as usual, but was met with the prompt response—"I can't do it, sir," from everyone upon whom he called.

He ran his eye over the class, marked the flushed faces and averted eyes, and smiled; for he had not forgotten his own struggles, years before, with these very problems.

"Is there anyone present who will put the fourteenth on the board and explain it to the class?" he inquired.

The boys mostly wore a half-defiant, "I-can't-but-I-don't-care" expression, and the girls appeared confused and discouraged; but no one made any move to comply with his request.

"Well, well!" said the professor good-naturedly; "this lesson was a poser, wasn't it?—but I really hoped there would be some one who would conquer these giants in the way. Miss Lawrence, were they too much for you also?"

"N-o, sir," modestly returned Margaret. She had shrunk from making herself conspicuous by offering to put the problem he had called for on the board.

"Ah!" he said in a satisfied tone, "have you worked them all out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then please put the fourteenth on the board and explain it to the class."

Margaret arose to comply with his request, but as she was passing Josephine Ashton, the jealous girl sneered audibly and muttered something about a "mathematical prodigy," which sent the blood tingling to Margaret's finger-tips.

But she quickly performed her work, then explained it in a way to show that she clearly comprehended it, after which she quietly returned to her seat amid the applause of the class; for the fourteenth was the biggest stumbling-block in the way and the key to all the others.

One morning about a week after this, the class realized that something had gone very wrong, the moment Professor Allyn entered the room.

As soon as the opening exercises were concluded, he rapped sharply upon his desk for attention, which was instantly accorded him.

"Scholars," he began in a cold, stern tone, "nothing could cause me keener pain than to learn that any member of this class would be guilty of deception, or any dishonorable act, in order to gain a high standard of scholarship; it would not only be a great wrong against others, but most degrading to the offender. I regret to say I have reason to believe that there is some one in the room who has a key to the algebra we are using, which, as you all know, is strictly forbidden. *And now, the one who has such a book may bring it to the desk.*"

There was an oppressive silence in the room when he concluded. Every face before him wore a look of blank amazement, while not a student moved to do his bidding.

Professor Allyn stood like a statue, his face white and set from displeasure, while he waited to be obeyed.

Still no one moved.

"I perceive I shall be obliged to resort to more radical measures," he said sharply. "As I call the roll let each scholar reply 'yes' or 'no,' as the case may be."

The roll was called. The response was invariably:

"No, sir."

The man's eyes flashed fire as he concluded and put down the record.

"Let every book be removed from each desk and placed upon the top," he thundered.

There were wondering faces and quaking hearts as the work of examining the desks began.

The very first book that Margaret Lawrence drew forth was the forbidden key!

CHAPTER XII.

AN expression of mingled astonishment and consternation swept over Margaret's face as her glance fell upon the little volume which she had never seen until that moment. Then the hot, swift color surged up to her temples, an overwhelming flame, but only to recede as quickly as it came and leave her startlingly pale and with a heart beating with almost suffocating rapidity.

What did it mean? What could she do?

She had affirmed to her principal and in the presence of the whole school that she had nothing of the kind in her possession, and here, in her hands, she held the witness to her apparent guilt and a falsehood to conceal it.

What could she say? how establish her innocence and win back the confidence and respect of her teacher and her classmates in the face of such conclusive evidence?

For a moment, that seemed an age, she was almost crushed with grief and shame, as she tried to think how she could meet this trying ordeal. The next she arose in her seat, though she trembled in every limb, and held the book aloft where it could be seen by everyone in the room.

"Professor Allyn," she began in a clear but trem-

ulous voice, "I have found a key to our algebra in my desk; but I do not know how it came there. I have never used a mathematical key in my life—I have never even seen one before."

Every eye was fixed upon her, and there was a sharp rustle of excitement throughout the room.

Professor Allyn's searching eyes did not leave her face while she was speaking; indeed he had been covertly watching her from the first, and he had been considerably perplexed by her manner; but there was the evidence of her guilt in her hands, and what could he think?

"Miss Lawrence, I am more pained than I can express," he gravely remarked. "I knew the key was in your desk, for I went to it this morning to get the philosophy I loaned you yesterday, and in my search for that the key came to light."

"But it was not here yesterday afternoon when I left the room," Margaret affirmed with quivering lips, "for I arranged everything at the close of school and only my usual books were in my desk; besides, I always do my algebra problems at home, and if I had been in the habit of using a key I should never have brought it to school."

This was certainly a telling argument, and Professor Allyn's face lost something of its stern look.

"Could it be possible," he asked himself, "that the girl had an enemy in the class, who, jealous of her proficiency in mathematics, had taken this cowardly way to place her in a false position?"

She did not appear like a person capable of such

deception; her eyes met his frankly and steadily, but yet with a look of pain and perplexity in them that strongly appealed to him.

He hardly knew what to think—what course to pursue. He now regretted that he had made the matter so public, that he had not sought her personally, and privately charged her with the offense; but he had been so indignant upon finding the book—which seemed to prove that both he and the entire class had been grossly and habitually deceived—he felt that only open exposure and reprimand were adequate punishment for such a misdemeanor. And yet, what if she were innocent, after all?

“You may be seated, Miss Lawrence, and I will inquire further into the matter by and by,” he finally remarked, and Margaret sank into her chair, her heart almost breaking with humiliation and a keen sense of injustice.

When recess time came she was too wretched to go out to mingle with her classmates, so remained in her seat, with the obnoxious key still lying on her desk, a mute reminder of her recent mortification.

Every scholar had left the room and Professor Allyn had gone to another portion of the building, much to Margaret's regret, for she had hoped that he would take this opportunity to “inquire further into the matter,” thus she almost felt as if she were ostracized from the support and sympathy of everyone.

But she had not been alone three minutes, when Louis Arnold looked in at the door, then came directly to her. They had become quite friendly by

this time, and her face lighted instantly at his approach.

"I have come to tell you that I do not believe you ever used that key, Miss Margaret," he said, then added: "And the general opinion among the boys is that some one has played a mean trick upon you."

"Thank you for coming to tell me of your confidence in me," Margaret returned, but finding it almost more than she could do to preserve her self-possession at this evidence of faith and good-will. After a moment she went on: "But I cannot *prove* that I did not use the key, and of course I cannot help feeling very unhappy about it."

"I believe you can prove it," Louis replied, after thinking a moment.

"How?" she questioned eagerly.

"You can give up the book to Professor Allyn, and then if you continue to do your work just as well as before that would be proof enough for everybody."

"I don't know," said Margaret doubtfully; "they might reason that I could easily procure another."

"I had not thought of that," said Louis; then as his eye fell upon the key, he asked: "Is this the miserable bone of contention?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, regarding it askance.

"May I look at it?"

"Of course, if you like—I have not even opened it."

Louis picked it up and slowly slipped the leaves through his fingers, glancing curiously at the pages as he did so.

Suddenly he paused as a small square of paper fluttered out and fell to the floor.

"What is this, I wonder?" he remarked as he stooped to recover it.

It proved to be a piece of tissue paper, such as is placed between visiting cards to prevent the name which has been engraved or printed thereon being soiled, and on this there was the faint imprint of a name—very faint it was, and the lettering, being reversed, seemed almost illegible.

He turned it over, but with not much better results; then held it up to the light and studied it intently for a moment or two.

"Aha!" he finally exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction, "I suspected as much."

"What is it?" Margaret questioned almost breathlessly.

He held the paper between her eyes and the light, and she beheld, traced in very indistinct characters, some of which were scarcely distinguishable, a name that looked like "Robert G. Ashton."

The girl suddenly flushed an angry scarlet, and her usually gentle eyes flashed fire as they met those of her companion in a mutually comprehensive look.

"Josephine Ashton did it," said Louis in a tone of conviction. "Bob Ashton is her brother; he graduated from Harvard last year, and this key must belong to him. I am going straight to Professor Allyn to tell him about it."

His own eyes were blazing with indignation, his lips curled, his nostrils dilated with scorn, and he

betrayed evidences of excitement that were very unusual in our young hero, who was habitually self-contained and rarely allowed himself to act upon the impulse of the moment.

Had this discovery been made in his own interest, doubtless he would have gone away by himself and thought it all over very carefully before taking any step against the one who had perpetrated the wrong against him; but now all the chivalry in his nature had been aroused to defend this girl who had been the victim of a mean jealousy, and so unjustly and publicly disgraced because of it.

Somehow he felt called upon—almost as if he had the right, so to speak—to stand by her; for, away back at the time of their first meeting, there had seemed to be a kind of bond established between them—a bond which the possession of her little ring for so many years had been the guarantee, even though she had never dreamed he had it. Then, too, she had lost her father, her brother was away in college, and there was no one else to fight her battles here in school.

For the moment Margaret herself had felt almost as anxious as he to have Mr. Allyn and everybody else in the class know the truth; in that first flash of angry feeling she had thought that no punishment, however severe, could be too heavy to be meted out to one who had wronged her as Josephine Ashton had done.

Then she began to consider what the consequences would be. If, through this discovery, Josephine

should be publicly disgraced, and the contempt of her teacher and the whole class be turned upon her, it would only serve to make of her a more bitter enemy than now; and she had been yearning to be upon friendly terms with her.

Her own suffering had been, still was, terrible beyond description—almost more than she could bear, she thought; how then could she wish anyone else to be subjected to the same experience? Would it not be better to go quietly to Josephine, have it out with her and trust to her honor to vindicate her?

“What do you suppose Professor Allyn would do if he knew?” she inquired of Louis, after running these things over in her own mind.

“Why, just what he ought to do—bring the real culprit to summary justice,” he spiritedly responded, and then turned with the book in his hand as if to go directly to find the principal.

Margaret put out a trembling hand to detain him.

“Wait—please; don’t,” she pleaded. “I——”

“Of course I shall, or else you must,” he interposed with decision. “This is the meanest trick I ever heard of, and I’m not going to stand tamely by and let you bear such a wrong. I should feel like a—a coward.”

Margaret smiled faintly at his earnestness.

“You are very good to take my part so bravely,” she said gratefully; “but I think I would like to settle this quietly if I can. I believe I will return the book to Miss Ashton, and perhaps, when she learns what we have discovered, she may be willing

to do what is right. Please promise me you will not say anything about it—at least until I see what I can do.”

“I don’t like to do that,” said Louis reluctantly. “Why, I should think you would be too angry for anything, and feel that nothing would be too bad for her.”

“I did feel so at first,” the girl confessed with a burning flush; “but——”

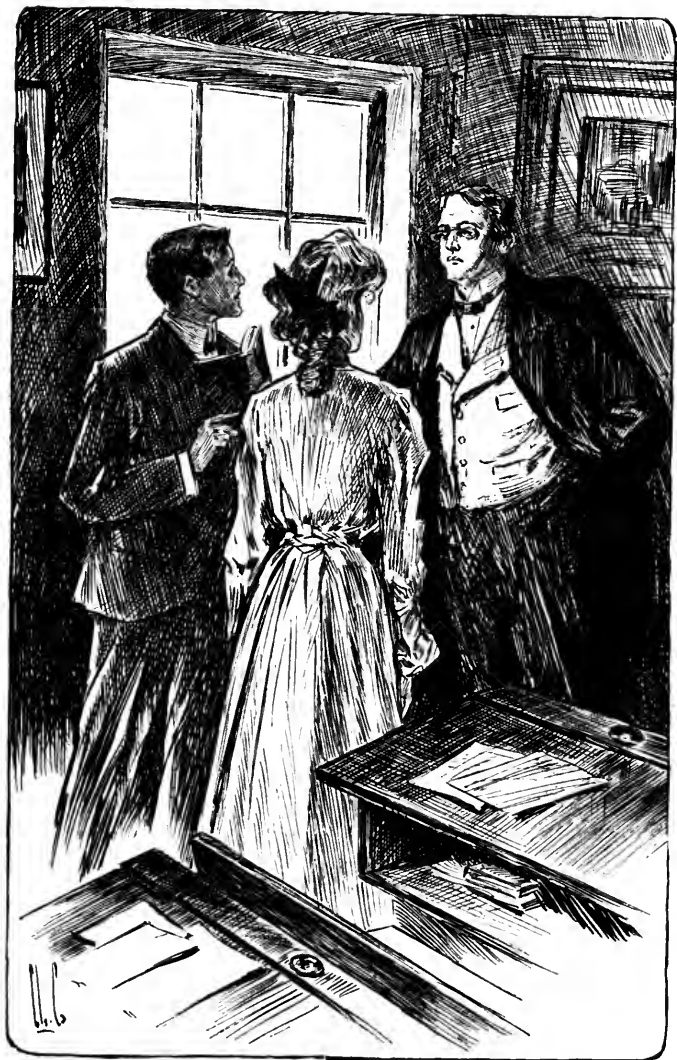
“Well?”

“I know I should feel mean and sorry afterwards if I should do anything out of a spirit of revenge; it isn’t quite the right way to treat an enemy, you know,” Margaret returned with downcast eyes.

Louis experienced a sudden inward shock at her words. In his ardor to espouse her cause and see justice done her, he had forgotten his own rule of life for the time being. He also had been taught to return good for evil; to bless them that persecute; and he also now flushed crimson under the gentle rebuke.

“I understand,” he said in a low tone. “I know that what you want to do is right, and you will feel better for giving Miss Ashton a chance. But a fellow hates to see a girl abused as you have been, and it almost makes me feel like a sneak to know about this and let you bear blame that doesn’t belong to you. All the same, I’ll promise not to say anything about it if you wish me to.”

“Thank you ever so much; and now let me tell you it has done me a great deal of good to have this little talk with you, and——”



The boy and girl both started violently as Professor Allyn's cold, grave tones fell upon their ears.

"What is this you are promising not to tell, Arnold? Ah! I will take that book if you please."

The boy and girl both started violently as Professor Allyn's cold, grave tones fell upon their ears. They had been standing by an open window looking out upon the street, and had been so absorbed in their confidential talk they had not observed the man's approach until he was close beside them.

Both colored consciously at his question and demand; but, in his loyalty to Margaret, Louis' hand closed involuntarily over the key as he glanced inquiringly at her to ascertain if he should give it up.

"The book, Arnold!" the principal reiterated authoritatively, and the young man reluctantly relinquished it to him, yet with a secret hope that he also would discover the truth.

"Do you know anything about this key?" Professor Allyn demanded, as he searched the boy's face with his keen eyes.

"I—I never saw it until this morning, sir," Louis replied evasively.

"Miss Lawrence has also made the same statement," the principal dryly observed; "but do either of you *know* to whom it belongs?"

Both were silent and greatly embarrassed.

Louis had promised Margaret that he would not give away what he knew, yet he was just aching to do so; while the young girl was in an agony of fear lest her plan for returning good for evil should come to nought.

"Arnold, do you know?" persisted his teacher.

"Y—es, sir; but I have just promised Miss Lawrence that I would not tell," was the reluctant reply.

"Very well"—sharply—"I will not compel you to break your word; but this is a very serious matter and must be thoroughly sifted; and I insist, Miss Lawrence, that you tell me to whom this key belongs—ah!"

From force of habit the man had opened the book to glance at the fly leaf, and there lay the square of tissue paper which Louis had carefully placed inside the cover after showing it to his companion.

Professor Allyn examined it critically, but at first making nothing of it, he also held it up to the light and then spelled out the name "Robert G. Ashton."

He gazed in perplexity first at Louis then at Margaret, as he began to comprehend the situation; then the whole plot suddenly flashed upon his mind.

He had known that Josephine Ashton had been very jealous of Margaret—knew that she had easily borne off the laurels of the class until this young girl appeared upon the scene to take the lead, when she had betrayed an intolerance, a petty spite which had both pained and surprised him. Now he was appalled as he began to see through the plot to injure an innocent classmate, and he regretted more than ever having made the affair so public. Now there were two involved and, in order to do full justice to Margaret, he would be obliged to make just as open an example of Josephine as he had made of Margaret; whereas, if he had taken more time to con-

sider, all might have been quietly settled between himself and the two girls.

"I understand," he said sadly, after taking this bird's-eye view of the situation. "But why did you wish Arnold to promise not to reveal what you had discovered? What were you intending to do about this disgraceful affair?" he inquired of Margaret.

She saw that the secret was out and there would be nothing gained by trying to conceal anything; that it would be better to frankly explain her attitude to him.

"Miss Ashton has appeared to dislike me ever since I entered the school," she began; "but I like to be friendly with all my classmates. I do not believe she stopped to think what a dreadful thing she was doing when she put the key in my desk—for, of course, after finding her brother's name in it, we know she must have done it—and I thought if I quietly returned the book to her, without making any fuss about it, she would know I wished to be kind and considerate, and so might perhaps be willing to set me right, at least with you——"

"And you were going to trust to her honor to do this, after suffering such a wrong at her hands!" interposed Professor Allyn, his face glowing with his admiration for the high-minded girl, while Louis' eyes plainly expressed his appreciation of her beautiful spirit.

"Sometimes it is better to trust people than to condemn them," said Margaret thoughtfully, "anyhow I was willing to try it."

"Even to the utter sacrifice of self! for, once having relinquished this bit of paper and with Arnold pledged to secrecy, you would have no proof of your innocence," said the Principal, and wondering if she had thought of this.

"I know," said the girl, flushing; "but—if one could win a friend——"

"But Miss Ashton could never be your friend without first doing you full justice," interposed her teacher.

Margaret's eyes were luminous as she lifted them to his.

"Of course I know she can never be happy until she does right," she gently replied; "but if she could be helped on the way it would be a—a double conquest, wouldn't it?"

Professor Allyn reached down and clasped the girl's hand.

"Miss Lawrence—Margaret," he said with evident emotion, "I have no words to express my appreciation of such self-abnegation; but"—in a positive tone—"justice will not allow me to aid and abet you to quite the extent you desire. I will gladly help you to win your friend and Miss Ashton to do right; but you must be vindicated before the class. I will, however, think the matter over more at length before taking any action. Meantime you may solace yourself by knowing that you have my unbounded admiration and esteem. God bless you, my girl!"

He turned away, deeply moved, taking the key with him, while Margaret and Louis smiled into each

other's eyes with mutual satisfaction, in view of the promising outlook for the future.

"By Jingo! I didn't think there was another woman in the world quite like Aunt Martha; but *her* mother must come pretty near up to her mark," quoth Louis to himself as, at the ringing of the bell, he went back to his own seat.

Before the session closed there was laid upon Josephine Ashton's desk a note in which she was asked to remain for a few minutes after the class was dismissed.

Without a suspicion of what was in store for her she sat quietly in her seat until the room was empty and Professor Allyn came to her.

He laid the bit of paper with the faint imprint of her brother's name upon it before her, then placed the key beside it.

"That slip of paper I found in this book, during recess, after taking it from Miss Lawrence; and there is but one inference to be drawn from the fact," he said gravely; then went on to tell her of his conversation with Margaret and of her wish that Josephine's agency in the matter should not be made known to the class.

"But," he continued, "Miss Lawrence must be exonerated. She is resting under a stigma in the estimation of the class and this must be removed at once. Now, Josephine, what will you do about the matter?"

The girl remained, after the first shock of surprise, sullenly silent while he was talking; but now,

at his appeal, she threw back her head with a haughtily defiant air.

"Nothing," she said through her tightly-locked teeth. "And no one can prove that I put that book in her desk."

"I admit that no one saw you do it," coldly rejoined her teacher, "and possibly the evidence would not be sufficient to convict you before a judge and jury; but, taking all the circumstances into consideration, to me there is proof positive that you did so."

He paused a moment, then added with deep feeling: "Josephine, don't let this stain rest upon your conscience. You alone will be the sufferer if you refuse to right this wrong, and all your life you will regret it. This is all I have to say about the matter, except that in deference to Miss Lawrence's request I shall call no names when I explain it to the class to-morrow morning. Here is your book," he concluded, putting the bit of paper inside and pushing it toward her.

"It isn't my book," cried the girl, springing to her feet, her face aflame with passion, as she shoved the obnoxious key farther away.

"Pardon me; I stand corrected. I will mail it to your brother," said Professor Allyn with icy politeness as he made a move to recover it.

With a look that would have annihilated him had it possessed the power, Josephine snatched it almost from his grasp and dashed blindly from the room.

But she was promptly back in her seat the next morning, and, to all appearance, serenely unconscious

that anything of more than usual import was pending, listening with stoical calmness while Professor Allyn briefly stated that the key found in Miss Lawrence's desk the previous day did not belong to Margaret, and had never been used by her. This had been satisfactorily proven to him, but, for good and sufficient reasons, he should not discuss the matter further—it was to be dropped, but Miss Lawrence was fully exonerated and was to be so regarded by the class.

After school was over Margaret was besieged by numerous questions regarding the affair, but to all she gave evasive answers, making light of it and saying that since she had been set right the sooner it was forgotten the better it would please her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE weeks later Louis received a voluminous letter from Aunt Martha, a missive which he devoured with avidity, and which contained some very interesting news that both pleased and surprised him.

First, Miss Wellington's brother-in-law had married again—a kind, capable woman who would make a good mother to the children for whom Aunt Martha had been caring during the last five years; and she felt that she could resign her duties with the comforting assurance that all would go well with them.

Second, almost immediately following the wedding she had been engaged as attendant and companion to a lady who had recently come to Colorado for her health. The husband of her charge could not be with his wife much of the time, because of the demands of business, hence for some time he had been seeking a responsible person who would not only give her proper care, but who would also be congenial and make her enforced absence from home as pleasant as possible.

“They are wealthy people,” Miss Wellington wrote, “and I find my position very agreeable since I have many privileges and luxuries such as I have never enjoyed before. The name of the family is Sherburne. They have a beautiful home in Chicago,

but seem to be very much alone in the world, having no children or relatives excepting Mrs. Sherburne's only sister, who, strangely enough, lives in your town. Her name is Ashton, and she has a son and a daughter, Robert and Josephine—possibly you may know them. I have told Mrs. Sherburne something about 'my boy,' and she has seemed interested in you, and has said 'when we go home he shall come to visit you;' which has made me very happy, for I am yearning for one of our heart-to-heart talks, and I am sure I shall find that my Louis has tried faithfully to live up to the standard we set ourselves in those old days in New Hampshire. Your letters tell me that, and so give me great joy."

There was much more, but the items recorded were especially interesting to Louis, who thought it very queer that Aunt Martha should have stepped right into a position with relatives of the Ashtons. He learned later that the Sherburnes used to come East every summer for a visit, but during the last five years Mrs. Sherburne had not been allowed by her physician to take the trip; instead she was ordered farther West.

Louis heard from his friend frequently after this change, for she had more time to herself and, as she was in a position where she saw more of life, her letters were full of interest, and contained much sound advice and loving counsel. Finally there came a missive telling him that Mrs. Sherburne "was gone" and that Miss Wentworth had, at Mr. Sherburne's earnest request, come to Chicago to take

charge of his home; and as they were now so much nearer each other, there was a possibility that they might occasionally meet.

So the weeks and months slipped away; the Christmas holidays and vacation passed; Spring opened and the Easter recess came around, during which Nellie Evarts made a house party, inviting five of her girl friends to spend a week with her; and Margaret Lawrence, who had become her dear "familiar spirit," was included among the number.

Something delightful was planned for every day, and there was to be a grand finale or class reunion the last evening of their visit, when they were to have an orchestra for the dancing, refreshments served by a Boston caterer, and last, but by no means least, a grand display of brand-new party dresses.

They were six merry maidens during that never-to-be-forgotten week. The Evartses lived in a fine spacious residence on the "swell" side of the river, and there was, at the top of the house, a great billiard-room which was the favorite resort of the sextet, for there they could get away from everyone else and chatter to their hearts' content without fear of being overheard. There were horses and carriages in the stable, and every fine morning the gay little party went spinning over the smooth country roads for a drive. There were also visits to various points of interest in and around Boston, interspersed with a couple of high-class matinées, which latter were an especial delight to all.

One afternoon—it was like a summer day—

Nellie proposed a tramp to a certain pine grove about half a mile from her home, and suggested that they take lunch baskets along and picnic in the woods. As Mrs. Evarts was very busy with preparations for the reunion, Nellie offered to take her two younger sisters with her and her friends, much to the joy of the little folks, and so made quite a party. The grove which they visited commanded a fine view of the river and the surrounding country. It also lay very near the railroad, and just at the foot of a rise of ground there was a grade-crossing which had recently been pronounced dangerous, and was, within a few weeks, to be raised to allow the trains to pass underneath and thus avert possible accidents.

The afternoon passed very quickly and pleasantly, the children hunting for cones, mosses, and other woodland treasures, while the six girls discussed various interesting matters, prominent among which was the beginning of school the following week—their last term in “dear old High”—the approaching graduation and plans for the summer vacation, after which there would be a scattering to different colleges or finishing schools not yet decided upon.

At half-past four lunch was served, and they were just in the midst of this when their attention was attracted by the clatter of horses’ hoofs, and presently they saw Josephine Ashton’s pretty pony-team coming down the hill on the opposite side of the railway.

She pulled up as she drew near the crossing which

ran so obliquely across the road as to make great care necessary in driving over it.

Mr. Ashton had often cautioned his daughter to be watchful of such places or she would be liable to get into trouble, and usually she was very careful; but this time, for some reason, she failed to guide her team aright and trouble did come.

The girls in the grove suddenly heard her cry out an imperative "Whoa!" in a shrill voice of fear, whereupon her gentle ponies, trained to perfect obedience, came to a stop almost instantly, but with the trap tilted to one side. Then they saw Josephine leap to her feet in the carriage and look anxiously up and down the road, as if searching for some one by the wayside to whom she could appeal for help.

"What can be the matter?" cried Nellie, rising from the log where she had been sitting, to get a better view.

"It looks to me as if one of the wheels was caught between a plank and the rail," said Margaret, who had herself been well trained in the art of driving, once upon a time.

"Oh, that is a bad fix! Do you suppose *we* could help her out of it?" anxiously inquired Alice Wellman.

"No," replied Margaret; "it would take a strong man to lift that trap and release the wheel. If only a team would come along—or if there was a house near by where we could go for help! But hark! oh, girls!—isn't that the five o'clock train up at the West station?" she concluded breathlessly, as a

sharp, shrill whistle, warning whoever it might concern to clear the track, fell on their ears.

"Yes, it is—it *is*! What *will* Josephine do?" panted Nellie excitedly, while Miss Ashton herself, having caught the appalling sound, fell to screaming for help at the top of her lungs and wringing her hands in the most frantic manner, for she well knew that if no one came to her assistance her lovely carriage would be dashed to pieces and her beautiful ponies killed, or frightened to death, before another five minutes elapsed. She did not even seem to have presence of mind enough to get out of the trap, and so was in imminent danger herself.

"*Something* must be done *quickly*!" Margaret exclaimed; and, springing to her feet, she darted out from the grove, speeding down toward the crossing as if those little members had been shod with wings.

"Get out!" she cried as she drew near the frightened girl. "Get out of the trap, Miss Ashton, and *take the reins with you.*"

This order was given because she saw the horses were becoming restless and nervous, and she feared they might start to run and so get beyond control.

Josephine, brought somewhat to her senses by the sound of a human voice, instantly leaped to the ground, but heedlessly leaving the lines hanging over the dashboard. Margaret, however, who was now close upon the scene, seized and had them knotted in a trice, throwing them lightly over the ponies' backs, speaking peremptorily yet reassuringly to the

restive animals as she did so. Then she sprang for a tug.

"Come," she called out anxiously to Josephine, "you must help me—quick!—unhitch those other traces!—we must free the horses at once!"

But the girl was absolutely helpless. She could hear the train steaming steadily toward them, although it was not yet in sight, and, almost frantic from terror, she was unable to do aught but wring her hands and sob that her ponies would be killed.

But Margaret, with nimble fingers, soon had the harness released on her side, then darted like a flash to the other just as the locomotive rolled into view around a near-by curve in the road.

How she accomplished the remainder of her task she never could tell afterward; it was all like an illusive dream to her as, the traces once free, she sprang to the horses' heads, grasped their bridles firmly with one hand, freeing the neck yoke with a single sweep of the other, when, with a gently spoken command, she started them forward and led them safely out of harm's way, at the same time cheerily encouraging and soothing them, but seeing, with quaking heart and failing vision, only that great, black, looming monster that was almost upon her.

The next instant, in spite of the ringing in her ears, she heard a crash, then confused commands mingled with frightened voices and the shuffling of hurrying feet. And she knew the pretty trap had come to grief.

The engineer had espied the danger ahead im-

mediately upon rounding the bend and instantly reversed his engine; thus, as he never ran at great speed between the East and the West stations—they being only a mile apart—the force of the collision was only sufficient to overturn the trap, wrenching off the imprisoned wheel and breaking the pole. No other damage was done save that of throwing the passengers into a temporary excitement and delaying the train for a few minutes, while the accident was investigated and the trainmen removed the obstacles from the track.

Meantime, Josephine had thrown herself prone upon the ground by the roadside, thrust her fingers into her ears and buried her face in the grass, to shut out the sight and sound of what she believed would be a horrible tragedy. Here Nellie Evarts and her friends found her when they arrived upon the scene, and tried to calm and reassure her; but this was not an easy task, for she was completely unnerved and nearly crazed with fear.

Among the passengers who alighted from the train to ascertain what had happened were two young men who had been to a neighboring town to witness a ball game. One of them, after ascertaining the cause of the delay, caught sight of Margaret, who was still caring for the ponies, and with a few flying leaps was beside her, an anxious look on his fine face as he began to comprehend something of the situation and the part she had borne in it.

The girl was almost spent from her heroic efforts, now that all danger was past, and was beginning

to feel that her strength would not endure the strain much longer, when she suddenly felt a firm hand laid upon the bridle above each of her own, while a familiar voice observed, with calm assurance:

"It is all right, Miss Lawrence. I have them well in hand now," and she lifted her drooping head to find herself looking into the clear, earnest, brown eyes of Louis Arnold.

"Oh! how glad I am! It seemed as if I could not hold them a moment longer," she breathed in a weak voice, while he could see that she was trembling from head to foot.

"Well, then, you may let go now," he said, smiling archly down upon her, for she still unconsciously retained an almost convulsive grasp upon the bridles.

She gave a little nervous laugh, and her arms dropped limply by her side.

"Oh, it was frightful!" she said, with a deeply drawn sigh. "I thought I never would get the ponies free from the trap—it would have been dreadful if they had been killed or hopelessly maimed."

"How about yourself? What if *you* had been killed or maimed?" Louis questioned rather shortly, as he led the horses to a near-by tree where he fastened them securely.

And Margaret laughed as she saw his point.

"I don't think that occurred to me," she said.

"It is Josephine Ashton's team, isn't it?" Louis inquired, while he searched her still white face solicitously.

"Yes, and I hope that pretty trap is not very badly smashed," Margaret observed, glancing over her shoulder at the wreck, and beginning to feel a little more like herself.

"I don't know whether it is or not," Louis rejoined somewhat indifferently. "That didn't interest me at all after I caught sight of you and comprehended what you had done. How did you know what to do to free the horses?"

"Oh, I used to have a pony and a dogcart when papa was here, and sometimes I helped the man harness just for fun. Besides, I've often watched him take the pair out," Margaret explained.

"Well, it was a big thing for you to do under the circumstances; and it was a very narrow escape for you as well as for the horses," Louis observed with clouded eyes. "Do you feel all right now?" he added with evident concern.

"Oh, yes; only I can't keep quite still yet," she said, holding out a hand that was far from steady. "But," she added naïvely, "the moment I heard your voice I felt as if everything would be all right."

Louis colored slightly at this, then smiled his pleasure as he said softly: "Thank you, Margaret."

"I wonder where Miss Ashton is," she presently observed; "suppose we look for her?"

They walked slowly back over the crossing together—the train having gone on—and soon came upon Nellie and her party gathered in friendly concern around Josephine, who was now sitting up, sup-

ported by one of the girls, but still weeping nervously.

"Was she hurt?" Margaret inquired of one of her friends.

"No, only terribly frightened and shocked," was the reply.

"Well, it was enough to frighten anybody," said Margaret sympathetically; "but, Miss Ashton"—approaching the sobbing girl—"the ponies are all right. They haven't even a scratch. I am sorry about the carriage, though," she added regretfully. "I wish that might have escaped, too—it was such a pretty trap; but perhaps it can be easily repaired," she concluded hopefully.

As she ceased speaking Josephine glanced up at her, gave her one swift, indescribable look, then fell to crying harder than ever, and Margaret, with a pained expression on her lovely face, slipped away and returned to the grove to gather up the fragments of the interrupted lunch and repack the baskets preparatory to going home.

Louis Arnold, with a look of lofty scorn in his fine eyes, and curling his lips, followed, deftly assisting her, after which he quietly took possession of the receptacles, saying he would be burden-bearer for the party on their return to town.

Meantime a carriage had come along, the owner of which, after learning of the accident, offered to take Miss Ashton and her ponies home—a kindness which the girl eagerly accepted.

The ponies were fastened to the back of the vehicle, while Josephine was assisted into it, and, as they drove away, the curious spectators dispersed, leaving the place deserted, nothing save the shattered trap remaining to tell the story of the recent mishap.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the evening of the same day on which the accident to Josephine Ashton's carriage occurred, Mr. and Mrs. Ashton drove over to the home of the Evarts to call upon Margaret and to express their gratitude to her for the heroism she had manifested in rescuing their daughter's ponies and, as they believed, for saving her own life also.

Evidently Josephine had given them a detailed account of what had happened, while they had also heard much from other sources, for news of the incident had spread like wildfire and was being talked over everywhere in the town; thus they seemed to fully realize their obligation to Margaret.

So much was said during their call in praise of what she had done that Margaret was beginning to feel greatly embarrassed and to wish that she might make her escape from the company, when Nellie's youngest sister, who, with wide eyes and eager ears, had been taking it all in, piped up in her shrill, penetrating little voice: "I guess, Miss Lawrence, you must be a—a heroess now."

This naïve observation and the general laugh that followed turned attention from Margaret to the smaller maiden, who was asked to define a "heroess," and after this the conversation gradu-

ally became more general and the modest heroine was allowed to rest upon her laurels.

This was on Saturday. On Sunday morning just before church time there came a box of beautiful roses and a basket of luscious fruit for Miss Lawrence, and these were accompanied by a kind note from Mrs. Ashton; but not one word from Josephine.

Mrs. Ashton wrote that her daughter was not feeling well and was keeping her room; hence she was writing to inquire if Margaret had experienced any ill effects from the previous day's excitement. She hoped Josephine would be better to-morrow and able to come to thank her in person, but the girl seemed prostrated and might even be obliged to miss the class reunion on Tuesday evening. Would Margaret please drop her a line to assure her that she was all right?

"Well, I just hope that Josephine Ashton *won't* come to my party," Nellie spiritedly asserted when Margaret showed her this note. "I should think she would be ashamed of herself not to send you just a word of acknowledgment, even if she is sick in bed. I don't understand it!"

Margaret made no reply to this indignant outburst. She thought she understood Josephine's silence, and she secretly admitted that she herself would better enjoy the prospective festivities if she remained away. Monday passed and still she heard nothing from her classmate, and finally concluded that, since what had occurred on Saturday had no

power to move her, the old feud would never be settled—they would never be friends.

Tuesday dawned a perfect day, and at an early hour the Evarts mansion and surrounding grounds began to be the scene of considerable bustle and excitement.

The broad verandas on two sides of the house were enclosed with canvas and decorated with evergreens and beautiful Chinese lanterns, which were also profusely festooned among the trees on the lawn. There were flowers and potted plants everywhere about the house where space could be found for them. The alcove under the great stairway in the hall was screened with laurel to conceal the orchestra which was to discourse sweet music throughout the evening, while the spacious double parlors had been cleared, the costly rugs taken up, and the floors waxed for dancing.

Everybody was busy, and everybody was happy, "from early morn till dewy eve," as they shared in these delightful preparations.

Nellie and Margaret occupied the same room, and when they finally went upstairs to don their pretty dresses, it was with a satisfied feeling that every room, nook, and corner were in perfect order and as beautiful as good taste, the united efforts of professional decorators and many helpers, together with a lavish expenditure of money by an indulgent father and hospitable host, could make them.

In the midst of the delightful occupation of dressing there came a rap on the girls' door.

"A package for Miss Lawrence," said the maid, who passed in what looked like a small box in an immaculate wrapper tied with white satin ribbon.

"What can it be?" cried Nellie, dancing across the room with it and waiting, all on the *qui vive*, to see it opened.

Margaret, no less curious, hurriedly undid it, lifted the lid of the box to find, reposing on a bed of pale pink cotton, an exquisite gold locket, set with pearls, attached to a no less lovely chain.

On the back of the locket a monogram, comprised of Margaret's initials, had been engraved, while within it there were places for the portraits of two people.

"How perfectly beautiful!" exclaimed Nellie. "Who could have sent it?—your brother?"

Margaret smiled a trifle sadly and shook her head.

"No, it could not have been Ted," she said, well knowing that the dear hard-working fellow could barely afford a suitable necktie for the occasion, let alone costly lockets set with pearls.

Presently she espied an envelope snugly tucked in between the cotton and one side of the box.

Drawing forth a delicately perfumed sheet from the enclosure she read the following:

DEAR MISS MARGARET: Please accept and wear to-night the accompanying testimonial to a brave girl—the united offering of my husband and myself.

Sincerely your friend,

HARRIET A. ASHTON.

The happy light suddenly died out of Margaret's eyes; the smiles faded from her lips; a burning flush swept over her face as she finished reading this note.

All this from Mr. and Mrs. Ashton and still not one word from Josephine! How could she wear the lovely trinket that night? It would be a continual reminder of the enmity of her classmate and spoil all her pleasure. She would have been far happier to have won the friendship of, and been at peace with, Josephine than to have had a hundred lockets and a deluge of pearls showered upon her.

With a regretful sigh she quietly laid the gift upon her dressing-table and went on with her toilet; while Nellie, reading something of what was in her mind, turned away with a frown upon her own brow, to look for a ribbon that she wanted.

Presently there came another tap and two huge, suggestive-looking boxes, one for "Miss Nellie Evarts," the other for "Miss Margaret Lawrence," were deposited inside the room.

Both contained long-stemmed roses—Nellie's crimson, Margaret's pink. The former was accompanied by a card bearing: "With compliments of Charles N. Osgood." The latter was the offering of "Louis Arnold."

This interruption changed the atmosphere and both girls began to dimple and bubble over again.

"My! I begin to feel like a regularly grown-up young lady about to make my *début*," cried merry Nell, holding her fragrant blossoms off at arm's

length in mingled admiration and delight. "Aren't they beauties? and"—with a ripple of amusement—"can't you just see, in your mind's eye, those two boys bashfully marching up to Irving's counter to give their order?"

"Well, they certainly have shown good taste and been very generous in their offerings," said Margaret with a responsive laugh, yet flushing consciously as she bent to inhale the perfume of her roses.

"Somebody thinks you are pretty fine—eh, Margaret?" roguishly observed Nellie, as she noticed her rising color.

"Well, I know some one who thinks Charlie Osgood is rather above the average," Margaret retorted to cover her embarrassment.

"Who could help it, dearie?—such a *nice boy*," was the demure reply; then, as their eyes met in a conscious glance, there was another burst of silvery, girlish laughter, whereupon both resumed their interrupted dressing.

They looked very fair and sweet when they went below to join their other friends and receive their classmates; but Mrs. Ashton's lovely gift to Margaret still lay unheeded in its box, upstairs on the dressing-table.

The guests soon began to pour in and the rooms were quickly filled. There were about seventy-five people present, including many of the parents of the seniors. Nellie, in looking them over, found that every one of her classmates had honored her invitation save Josephine Ashton. She was wounded, yet

at the same time she was relieved, for she had spiritedly resented what she called her "shabby treatment" of Margaret.

A few moments before the time for refreshments to be served, Margaret slipped upstairs to get a handkerchief, having dropped the one she had taken down with her and been unable to find it; and as she was about to enter her room, she saw through the half-open door a tall, slim figure standing by her dressing-table in a drooping attitude.

The figure turned, as she pushed the door wider and entered, and she found herself face to face with Josephine Ashton!

The girl was dressed in white and much more simply than usual; but Margaret thought she had never seen her look so lovely before.

She colored crimson as she met Margaret's glance of astonishment; then her eyes dropped to an envelope she was holding in one hand, and, for a moment, she seemed uncertain what to do.

The next, she threw back her proud head with a resolute air, and, going to Margaret's side, drew her gently within the room and shut the door.

"I know I am intruding and you must think it strange to find me here," she said, speaking with an effort, "but a servant told me this was your room and I came in to leave this letter for you"—touching the envelope with one white-gloved finger.

"You do not intrude," Margaret gently returned, but with quickened heart beats; "the guests have the freedom of the whole house to-night."

Again Josephine stood irresolute for an instant; then suddenly tossing the envelope upon the dressing-table, she swept close up to Margaret, laid her hands upon her shoulders and looked frankly down into her sweet, wondering blue eyes.

"Margaret Lawrence," she began in tremulous tones, "I am going to *tell* you about it. I wrote that letter because I was a coward and thought I hadn't the courage to face you. It is a confession of all the meanness, the folly, and the jealousy I have been guilty of toward you since you came into our class; and also of the wretchedness I have suffered in consequence. I will leave it because I can't rehearse it all again—I should forget half I ought to say. But I am very glad I have met you here alone, for now I need not wait to know if you can ever forgive——"

Before she could complete the sentence Margaret had slipped her arms around the girl's waist and drawn her into a close embrace.

"Oh, Josephine!" she breathed, her eyes glistening with inward joy—"if you could only know how I have longed to have you for my friend! Let all the past go—you do not need to say 'forgive'——"

"Indeed I do if I care anything about regaining my self-respect," Josephine huskily interposed; "tell me—*can* you? *will* you?"

"Of course I will, and——"

"But I have used you shockingly, Margaret."

"Let us forget it, please."

"I did put that key in your desk."

"Yes, I know; but——"

"And I have been furiously jealous of you," Josephine went on, as if determined not to be forgiven until she had uncovered everything. "I am two years older than you, and it has galled me more than I can tell you to have you lead the class."

"But I *had* to do as well as I could, Josephine," said Margaret apologetically.

"You dear little saint! you don't need to apologize for doing your level best. I am only trying to show you how very bad I have been," rejoined the penitent girl, with a catch in her breath that was between a laugh and a sob. "But tell me—why wouldn't you let Professor Allyn reveal to the class the name of the one who put the key in your desk?"

"I couldn't—that would have been dreadful; and I knew it would only have made matters worse between us."

"There are precious few people who would have cared anything about that. Oh, Margaret!"—and she was almost weeping now—"I don't know what to say to you! I have cried myself almost sick over it many a time; yet I have been too obstinate and too much of a coward to confess the wrong. But the other day you had your revenge——"

"Dear, I never had any desire to be revenged," interposed Margaret—"at least, after the first flash of temper was over," she conscientiously added.

"I know it, and that has made my own position all the more galling. Did you think it was all fright and grief over my broken trap that upset me so

last Saturday?" questioned Josephine sadly. "No, indeed; I was shamed, humiliated, broken-hearted, because I saw myself as I knew others must see me—a proud, selfish, arrogant girl, who, because of overindulgence at home, had grown to think that every one else must bow before her. But the scales fell from my eyes after that accident. There is no knowing what would have happened to me if you had not come to the rescue as you did; for I was paralyzed with fear. I absolutely could not move until you spoke to me, and then my only thought was to save myself; while you, utterly regardless of your own safety, never faltered until you had saved my ponies and—that locomotive had almost run you down. Ugh! it was horrible!" and she shivered nervously as she recalled the tragic experience.

"Then, when you came to tell me that the ponies hadn't even a scratch," she presently resumed, "and said how sorry you were that you could not have saved the trap also—that was the last straw. I have been sick in bed ever since—not from the shock, but because *I hated myself* and believed that you, Professor Allyn, and I don't know how many more must feel just the same toward me."

"No—no," Margaret began, but Josephine, giving her a little pat on the shoulder, went right on:

"I thought at first that I could not come to Nellie's party to-night. I could not endure to meet you. Then something told me to write to you—to make that a beginning toward something better in life, toward your standard—yours and Louis Arnold's,"

she interpolated, with a rising flush. "I have always admired him, ever since he entered the school, for nothing could ever tempt him to do a wrong or mean thing. He never would toady to any one either, but treated all alike, going straight ahead about his business, seeming to know just what was right to do and—*doing* it. You and he seem to be very much alike in that respect, and I suspect that is why he admires you so."

She bestowed a searching glance upon Margaret as she made the last observation and smiled slightly to see how the prettily fringed lids drooped suddenly over Margaret's eyes and the delicate pink deepened in her cheeks.

"So I wrote my letter," she continued, "and made up my mind to come here and leave it for you, tender my greetings to Mrs. Ashton and Nellie, out of respect for their invitation, then quietly slip away again with papa and mamma, who can only remain a little while because of another engagement. I told mamma the whole story while I was dressing, and she was so shocked. She said she never would have presumed to offer you a gift if she had known how badly I had used you, for it must seem almost an insult to you under the circumstances——"

"It was very kind of her—the locket and chain are beautiful," interposed Margaret with some embarrassment, and wishing now that she had them on.

Josephine smiled again. She had observed their absence and understood why they had not graced the occasion.

"But she was very nice to me," she went on, not appearing to heed Margaret's remark. "We had a lovely talk about it, and I think we shall always feel nearer each other because of it. And now I believe that is all I want to say to-night—are you sure you absolve me?" she concluded with brimming eyes.

"With all my heart, Josephine," was the earnest response.

"Then I am very glad I have seen you instead of waiting for you to read and reply to my letter. But I am keeping you a long time from the company downstairs."

"I do not mind, for I am happier than I can express to have the barriers between us broken down, and to know that, after this, we shall be friends," and Margaret's eyes now overflowed.

Josephine gently drew her toward her dressing-table.

"Then will you wear mamma's gift?" she pleaded. "I know it would please her to see you wearing it—may I fasten it around your neck?"

"Yes, indeed—please do," said Margaret eagerly, and suddenly experiencing great delight in her new possession. "It is the prettiest locket I ever saw, and I shall always love it—now."

Josephine had it fastened in place almost before she ceased speaking; then bending down she kissed the girl softly on her lips, while both felt as if a seal had been set upon a life-long friendship.

"Now, come," said Margaret, her face glowing with love and happiness, as she linked her arm

within her companion's; "let us go down and I will introduce you to mamma and Ted—my brother."

Josephine shot a startled glance at her.

"What must they think of me?" she questioned dubiously.

"They do not know."

"Margaret! have you never told them?"

"No, because I kept hoping that everything would come right; and if it did, I knew I should be sorry I had said anything about it."

Josephine could say nothing at this evidence of such sweet charity; she could only give the arm resting within hers an appreciative pressure, and then they went downstairs together.

Charlie Osgood saw them as they entered the drawing-room arm in arm, and his astonishment nearly caused him to upset a costly jardinière on the table beside him. He knew Josephine had always openly snubbed Margaret, and he also had his suspicions that she had put the key into the latter's desk, although, notwithstanding their intimacy, Louis had never hinted anything of the kind to him.

"Peter Piper!" he ejaculated under his breath. "I really believe that her imperial majesty has struck her colors at last! and if she has she means it for keeps."

Louis also observed their entrance, yet made no sign of surprise; but the look in his fine eyes, as they rested upon Margaret, plainly indicated his appreciation of that which, in her, had at last conquered

this proud spirit, winning her allegiance as she won all others."

After Josephine had greeted Mrs. Ashton and Nellie, Margaret led her directly to her mother and her handsome brother, who was soon to graduate from Harvard, introducing them to her, and then left her to chat with the latter, who, when the signal for refreshments was given, asked the privilege of supplying her needs.

Louis promptly presented himself at Margaret's side, and Charlie appropriating Nellie, they all went to the table together, the utmost cordiality prevailing among the sextette. Margaret's attitude toward Josephine having given them the cue, all tacitly and heartily accepted her friend as theirs.

How trivial a thing oft makes our friend a foe;

But how sublime it is to make a foe our friend.

The house party broke up the next day, each and all declaring the week of their sojourn with Nellie to have been "the loveliest time of their lives."

Monday morning following found the seniors all back in their places at school, eager to begin on the last term of their last year at "High."

Just before the lessons were taken up Josephine Ashton arose from her seat, an unwonted humility in her bearing. "Professor Allyn, may I say a few words to the class?" she inquired.

The professor looked surprised for the moment, then his face suddenly grew luminous. Instinctively he knew what was coming.

"Certainly, Miss Ashton," he cordially replied.

"A few months ago," Josephine resumed, but with lips that were absolutely colorless, "Miss Lawrence was arraigned before this class upon the supposition that she had been using a key to our algebra—one having been found in her desk. She was afterwards practically vindicated, but no *proof* of her innocence was given at that time. Actuated by unworthy motives I put the book in her desk. She has forgiven me. May I ask our principal and the class to be no less kind?"

There was a moment of oppressive silence after the trembling girl sank into her seat. Then Louis Arnold's hands came together with a resounding clap.

It was the signal for a rousing applause which attested the hearty appreciation of the entire class, in view of the moral courage which had prompted Miss Ashton to assume the blame that belonged to her, and thus fully exonerate Miss Lawrence.

Finally Professor Allyn arose and rapped for order. He was deeply moved.

"It seems almost superfluous for me to add anything to the expression of approbation and good-will so cordially and unanimously manifested by the class, and which shows me that you all honor one who has the courage of her convictions." He paused a moment, then resumed: "It is a noble stand that Miss Ashton has taken this morning, to thus publicly give us incontrovertible proof of the innocence of her friend, and in so doing she has also exonerated every other member of the class; for, of course, there

has been some doubt in the minds of all regarding who had thrown suspicion upon Miss Lawrence. This class will soon go out from me, some to pursue a higher course, others to take their places in the world; and, while my interest always follows my pupils in their chosen walks of life, I wish to say that every one of you will carry with you a larger share of my esteem because of the keen sense of what is just and honorable that you have shown to-day. You may now take your books."

The weeks sped by, June came, the examinations were passed, the class was graduated and its work in "dear old High" became a thing of the past.

Margaret led her class to the last, although Josephine followed a close second, while the bond of friendship recently established between them only grew stronger as the race went on. Before vacation was over Josephine had been admitted to Vassar, Margaret and Nellie were booked for Smith's College at Northampton, and Arnold and Osgood, having successfully weathered the trying preliminaries, had become Harvard freshmen.

CHAPTER XV

THE four years which Arnold and Osgood spent together as chums at Harvard were filled with hard, grinding work; this, however, was interspersed with much that was enjoyable and also with many other checkered experiences that appertain to the life of a college student.

Both were genial, manly, all-around fellows, and they could not fail to make many friends from the start. Still, they were there for honest work, with the determination to make the utmost of their opportunity; and while they did not ostensibly eschew all fun and frolic, they preserved a happy medium, sharing heartily in such legitimate recreations as they had time for, but, steadfastly keeping in view the goal they were striving to attain, firmly resisted any temptations that would encroach upon time that should be devoted to their studies.

During this period too Louis' high moral standard was never lowered; in everything he undertook he was governed by principle, and honesty, sincerity and thoroughness were the watchwords which he inflexibly obeyed in all his work and social relations; and thus throughout his whole course he gained and preserved the high esteem of both professors and classmates.

Mr. Richards was justly proud of his ward when, on the final commencement day, after the exercises were over and the clerk of the board of trustees arose to announce the prizes, he learned that Louis had won an important fellowship; while Farmer Weston and his wife could not have experienced more joy if the boy had been their own son. Osgood also came in for his share in the prize list and stood high in all his work, much to the gratification of his own family.

But when it was all over, in spite of the pleasurable excitement and triumphs of the day, when the last songs had been sung on the campus, when hand had gripped hand in final farewells and the class had melted away one by one, there were many sad hearts that pursued their homeward way, wondering, with an added pang, if they would ever meet in those dear familiar haunts again.

A few days later Mr. Richards asked Louis if he had made up his mind what profession or line of business he would prefer to follow. The young man replied that he felt it would take too long to prepare for a profession—he was eager to be doing something for himself, and thought he would like a commercial life as well as anything and did not care how soon he started in upon it.

“Then suppose, when Mrs. Richards and I return to Chicago, you go home with us, and I will see what I can do for you?” was the proposition his guardian made to him, and Louis readily fell in with it—all the more eagerly because the arrange-

ment would again put him in close proximity with his old friend Miss Wellington, as well as give him a wider field to work in.

The three girl friends who had been classmates with Arnold and Osgood in high school had also finished their course in college. Nellie Evarts was to sail for Europe in September and, with her parents, spend a year traveling abroad. Margaret Lawrence had arranged to return to Smith College as a teacher, to fill the vacancy of one who had married; and she felt justly proud to have been chosen for the position.

To Josephine Ashton there had come great changes during these four years. She lost her mother during her second year in college, and her father had followed while she was at home on her last vacation, after which sad event it was discovered that his affairs were seriously involved and that the supposed heiress would be reduced to the necessity of earning her own living in the future; for, when everything was settled, only a few paltry hundreds remained—barely enough to defray the expenses of her last year at Vassar. But, even though this would leave her almost penniless, she decided to return, for then she would be better fitted to face the world. In this decision she was seconded by her guardian, Mr. John Sherburne of Chicago, whom Mr. Ashton had appointed as such, and also as the executor of his will.

Mrs. Sherburne had been the only sister of Mrs. Ashton, and both she and her husband had been very fond of Josephine from her childhood, hence Mr.

Ashton's confidence in the man. Josephine's brother, Robert, had been much of a rover since leaving college, and was now supposed to be somewhere in South America.

During the four years the friendship between Margaret and Josephine had continually strengthened. They had corresponded regularly and had also seen much of each other during their vacations; while Margaret's brother, Theodore, had continued to evince a preference for Miss Ashton's society from the time of their introduction on the night of Nellie Evarts' party. Josephine, however, had been learning to care more and more for Louis, who when at home was made to feel that he was always a welcome guest at the Ashton's and was invariably the first to receive an invitation to their social functions.

Louis was not unmindful of this growing regard, but, while he was in college and until he knew definitely what his future was to be, he would not permit himself to manifest any preference, always dividing his time and attentions about equally between the three girls. Nevertheless there was always a brighter light in his eyes and a repressed eagerness in his manner whenever Margaret fell to his lot; and down in the depths of his heart he knew that no other would ever be so dear to him.

Upon their first meeting at the county fair he had thought her the most beautiful child he had ever seen; he had begun to love her then because she had been so kindly thoughtful of him—even to the spending of some of her pin-money for him. And at that time

he had felt that Ted must be about the happiest boy in the world to have such a sweet little sister. Then the finding of her ring seemed to establish a peculiar bond between them. Afterward when they had met at school and he had championed her cause—a little secret between them resulting from it—he began to have a sort of sense of proprietorship in her; and this feeling had continued to grow with the years that followed.

There had been times during his college life when he had strongly yearned for some expression of her sentiments toward him, but he resolutely adhered to his determination to make no advances until he attained a position worthy of her acceptance; hence his eagerness to get into business and his decision to go to Chicago with the Richardses when their summer outing was over.

Upon his arrival there he made it his first duty, as it also was his pleasure, to pay a visit to Aunt Martha.

Miss Wellington still retained her position as housekeeper for Mr. John Sherburne, which virtually meant that she was lady of the house, with plenty of help to command, presiding at his table, entertaining his friends, etc., and, as these duties necessitated considerable care regarding her personal appearance, Louis found that she had blossomed out into quite a genteel, stylish lady—in fact he thought her downright handsome in her soft black silks with rich creamy laces at her neck and wrists, and her still abundant hair becomingly arranged.

Miss Wellington, on her part, experienced no less pride and satisfaction in the manly, cultured fellow whose character she had so conscientiously tried to mould in his boyhood; and who, as he now stood before her with his clear, frank eyes and earnest face, seemed the embodiment of all that was noble and true and morally clean.

Previous to this, however, she had made a very curious discovery—one which she was sure was in some way connected with Louis. Yet she had never written him anything about it because, after learning that he was coming to Chicago to live, she thought the story could be much more easily told than written.

Mr. Sherburne never gave himself any concern about his household affairs—always leaving everything to his housekeeper and the servants; and he never could endure the slightest confusion in his home.

Whenever house-cleaning time came around he would invariably vanish for a week, telling Miss Wellington that she might consider herself the monarch of all she surveyed during his absence, with one exception—his library must remain untouched; and he never would consent to have it thoroughly cleaned, much to the annoyance of the good woman, who insisted that every other nook and corner of her domain be kept in the most immaculate condition. Now and then, upon her insistence, he would allow the rugs to be taken up and cleansed and the floors done over; but his books and papers must never be touched. During all the years she had lived there

not a volume had been removed from its place, except as he had wanted to use it, and the thought of the dust which must have collected in and around them was revolting to her rigid ideas regarding cleanliness.

But, this summer, the man had suddenly taken a whim to have the room repapered and completely renovated; and now Miss Wellington found she had need of all her patience and tact, for he asserted that everything must be done under his own personal supervision, all books taken down in their order and placed in certain places and tiers to insure their being returned to their proper shelves after the cases were done over.

It was while they were thus engaged that Miss Wellington came upon a small package, wrapped in brown paper, and which had evidently been carelessly shut away in a book and forgotten.

It was while dusting this volume that its contents came to light and she observed that a faded blue ribbon was loosely wound around the paper, but was not tied.

"Is this of any special value, Mr. Sherburne?" she inquired as she held it up before him.

"What is it?" he queried, extending his hand for it.

But he took it from her heedlessly, whereupon the ribbon came off, the paper loosened, and the contents slipped to the floor, leaving the wrapper in his grasp.

The contents consisted of five photographs.

Miss Wellington stooped quickly to recover them,

and as she did so a shock went quivering through her from head to foot.

She had instantly recognized three of those photographs. They were Louis Arnold's father and mother and a likeness of himself taken when he was an infant. The other two faces she had never seen.

Martha Wellington was naturally a very self-contained woman, else she might have betrayed her recognition of these faces in her surprise; but she gathered them up with apparent calmness, observing, while doing so, this inscription written on the back of one of the cards:

CAPTAIN JOHN SHERBURNE,
Of Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh.

Her eyes swept the face of her companion with keenest scrutiny as she laid the pictures in his hand, and saw, as he ran them over, that he suddenly flushed a startled crimson, then turned a sickly white.

"Aha! some family photographs!" he remarked, after a moment of hesitancy, during which he made a mighty effort to regain his self-poise; for he had become aware of a peculiar expression on the face of his housekeeper, whose grave eyes were keenly searching his own. Then, as a guilty conscience almost always overreaches itself, he held the picture of the English captain off at arm's-length and added, with a forced smile:

"My father, Miss Wellington—he didn't make a bad-looking soldier, did he? There isn't much resemblance between us, however, even though I bear

his name. I have wondered what had become of these pictures."

Then hastily shuffling them together, he folded the wrapper about them, winding the string around the package, and tossed it carelessly upon his desk.

Miss Wellington made no reply, but turned back to her work, her head in a whirl.

What did it mean? She knew she had not been mistaken, for she would have recognized the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold anywhere; and Louis—she had held him in her arms many a time when he was a baby in long clothes. But how came John Sherburne by them? and he had claimed them as family photographs! Could it be possible that he was a relative of Louis' father or mother?

Still he had acted strangely the moment he saw them. He had been startled; there had been a suggestion of fear and guilt in his manner as if there were something connected with the pictures that he was afraid to have known.

But for that she might have betrayed her recognition of them, for it had almost been on her lips to utter their names when she had caught his start and saw him change color. It was very mysterious, and the incident kept recurring to her mind throughout the day.

Late in the afternoon, after going through his desk and a cabinet, weeding them out, and putting what he rejected into a box, he told her to have William take the rubbish out in the morning and consign it to the waste-barrel.

But Miss Wellington, always caretaking, thought she would look the box of rubbish over, to be sure nothing of value had slipped into it, when, in the very heart of the mass of old letters, bills, etc., she found the package of photographs that had so mystified her earlier in the day.

She deliberately put them into her pocket, but more perplexed than ever; for why should the man wish his "family pictures" destroyed?

That evening, in the privacy of her own room, she took them from their place of concealment and studied each face carefully.

"There can be no doubt about these three," she at length observed, separating the Arnold group from the others. "I have known them too long and too intimately not to be sure; and this dress on the baby—I remember it well; it was Louis' christening robe, and his mother worked the waist and sleeves with her own fingers. But these I know nothing about," she continued, taking up the other two cards, a bewildered look in her eyes. "The English captain Mr. Sherburne claims as his father. Could this woman have been his mother? And if this is true, what possible connection can the Arnold family have with him? I have never heard him refer to a single relative until to-day. He said he had 'missed the pictures—had wondered what had become of them,' and now he has voluntarily thrown them away—even taking the trouble to hide them in the midst of that rubbish. It is certainly very mysterious!"

She finally put the photographs away, locking

them in a small compartment of her desk, the key to which she always carried about her person.

This strange occurrence haunted her for a long time and aroused a suspicion in the woman's mind that there might be something connected with his early life which Mr. Sherburne was anxious to conceal, and she longed for the coming of Louis, to whom she intended to show the pictures and ascertain what theory he would advance regarding the matter.

When he did finally come it was a most happy meeting after five long years of separation.

"So you are through college, dear boy," she said, with a proud look and intonation, when the first joyous greetings were over and she had made him sit down beside her with his hand still clasped in hers. "How doubtful such a prospect seemed when you and I parted that day in New Hampshire! But I never lost my faith that you would be amply provided for—not even during those darkest days when you were at the farm. How wonderful it has been! And you have also done your part—you have been a faithful worker and are now ready to start out in life for yourself. What are you going to do?"

"Going to make my fortune, Aunt Martha," he cheerily returned, as he smiled fondly into the face of the friend he loved as dearly as ever.

"Yes, but how?" she persisted, for this stage in his career had caused her much serious thought.

"Well, to begin with, I am going to take the first honorable position I can find, and do my level best

in it, of course keeping my eyes wide open all the time for something better."

"Good boy! That is the right spirit," said Miss Wellington approvingly, then added: "I imagined that Mr. Richards might want to make a lawyer of you."

"I think it would have pleased him if I had chosen his profession," Louis gravely replied; "but that would have taken three or four years more before I could really get into the traces for work. I want to be doing something for myself to make a home and have you in it with me—you dear woman;" and he gave her arm an affectionate stroke that spoke volumes. "Really, Aunt Martha," he presently resumed, "Mr. Richards and the Westons have done so much for me I somehow shrink from increasing my obligations; and besides, I do not think I was cut out for a lawyer—I am just longing to get into active business. But"—smiling—"there is getting to be too much *ego* about this, and you must have a lot that is interesting about yourself stored up for me. I can't tell you, though, how disappointed I was because you could not come on to commencement."

"Well, I had made all my plans to do so, as you know, when Mr. Sherburne was taken ill. It was a blow to him as well as to me, for he had planned to go to Vassar to be present at the graduation of his ward, Miss Ashton, who, by the way, is coming to us, with the hope of getting a position to teach, after she has made some visits in the East," Miss Wellington explained, then went on: "But it was very nice

of you to send me those few lines, every day of that busy week, to keep me posted. It was next to being there in person, and I was very proud when I heard of the honors you had won."

They talked on some time longer of matters in general, Miss Wellington going more into detail regarding her life during their long separation than she had been able to do in her letters; then all at once she inquired:

"Louis, what was your mother's maiden name? It seems strange that, as intimately as I knew her, I never heard her mention it."

"Why!—did she never tell you? It was Annie Judkins."

Miss Wellington looked disappointed; she had almost hoped to hear something entirely different.

"Do you know anything about your grandparents—her father and mother?" she thoughtfully pursued.

"Very little," said Louis. "Mother never seemed to like to talk about her family. She said her father died when she was ten years old; then she and her mother came to this country and lived in Lowell, Mass., until she met father, who was a teacher there, and they were married. About a year and a half later I appeared upon the scene, and when I was only a few weeks old my grandmother died. That fall father was appointed principal of the high school in ———, New Hampshire, and—but you know the rest, Aunt Martha."

Yes, she had heard all that before, but she was

disappointed not to get even a ray of light upon the mystery which so puzzled her. Then a new thought occurred to her.

"Do you know what your grandmother's maiden name was?" she inquired.

Louis laughed.

"Aunt Martha, you seem inclined to go into chronological details to-day," he said; "but they never held much of interest for me. No, I never heard my mother mention any relative as far back as that."

"Then—of course you do not know whether there was ever any one by the name of Sherburne connected even remotely with your family?"

Louis started as, for the first time in years, his thoughts reverted to those photographs he had lost on that last trip from New Hampshire. Indeed, the incident had long since almost faded from his mind; not even when Miss Wellington had informed him with whom she was living had the name of Sherburne suggested anything to him.

"Why, Aunt Martha!" he exclaimed, "it really is very queer, but it has never occurred to me before that you are keeping house for a man by the same name—*John* Sherburne! I wonder if—if there is any connection between the two!"

"What are you talking about, Louis?" she inquired, and regarding him curiously.

"Something that happened to me when Mr. Richards and I were on our way home from that trip to New Hampshire. You remember that box of old letters you found among mother's things?"

"Yes, and I put them away for you because I thought they might possibly contain something of interest to you when you were older. But what of them?" and Miss Wellington was now all on the alert.

"You know you left all the things with Mrs. Goodman, to be taken care of until I could find a home," Louis continued. "I went there to pack and bring them away, and, while doing so, I dropped that box of letters, scattering them in every direction. In picking them up I found a little package tied with a blue ribbon. Feeling curious to know what it contained, I opened it and found five photographs——"

"Ah!——"

"Father's and mother's, with one of me, taken when I was a baby, and two others whom I did not know. One was a woman, the other an English soldier dressed in full uniform, and on the back of this a name had been written——"

"Louis!—and that name was—?" almost breathlessly interposed Miss Wellington.

"John Sherburne, captain in one of Her Majesty's regiments. I have forgotten the number," the young man replied.

"Where are those pictures now?" demanded his companion.

"I lost them——"

"Lost them! When? Where? How?" and the usually self-contained woman was actually trembling from excitement as at last she began to discern a ray of light.

"I put them in my pocket, with one of yourself, which you gave me when you went away, for I wanted to look at them again; then I finished packing my things to take to Mr. Weston's," Louis resumed. "On the way to Boston I took the photos out and showed them to Mr. Richards, after which I tied them up again, and thought I put them back in my pocket; but I suppose I was careless, for when we got home that night I looked for them and they were gone. I only found yours, which was in an envelope by itself, and which I had slipped into another pocket."

"You lost them on the train!"

"Yes, I think so, and I felt pretty badly, for I liked that picture of my father better than the one in mother's album. But it is queer about that English captain and the name, isn't it?" Louis concluded musingly.

"It certainly is," responded Miss Wellington, in a repressed tone. Then rising, she added: "Excuse me for a moment, Louis. I want to get something that is upstairs." She left the room and ran swiftly up to her own, where, unlocking her desk, she took from it the package which she had found among Mr. Sherburne's discarded rubbish the day they were dusting his books in the library.

A minute later she was back downstairs, and handed the parcel to Louis, observing:

"There is something which I would like you to examine."

His eyes grew wide with wonder as he took it,

for it had a strangely familiar look; then he flushed a startled crimson as he hastily removed the covering and recognized its contents.

"Aunt Martha, how came *you* to have *these*? They are the very pictures I lost that day on the train!" he cried in tones of amazement.

Miss Wellington seated herself again beside him and related how and where they had been found; how strangely Mr. Sherburne had appeared at the time, and how they had afterwards come into her hands.

"Of course I instantly recognized your own and your father's and mother's faces," she remarked, in conclusion, "although I had presence of mind enough not to betray the fact to Mr. Sherburne, for I saw at once that there was a secret of some kind connected with his possession of them; and I have been very impatient to have you come, so that we might talk it over together."

"And he claims that this soldier, 'John Sherburne, of Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh'—I remember the number distinctly now—was his father, and that he was named for him?" said Louis inquiringly, while he studied the face of the fine-looking captain attentively.

"Yes, that was what he said, although there was a peculiar constraint in his manner as he did so; while, the next moment, he appeared to regret that he had offered any information regarding the pictures, and hurried them out of sight, immediately

changing the subject. I afterwards found them hidden among the rubbish to be thrown out."

"It certainly is a very peculiar affair," Louis observed; "but, Aunt Martha, I can swear that these are the identical pictures I lost—I even recall this broken corner on the old lady's photo. Do you suppose she was my grandmother?"

"I can only surmise, dear boy," said his friend, "but one would almost imagine, from the fact that the five likenesses are together, that she and the captain may have been the parents of your mother; and yet there is the name, you see—that is against that theory. I am deeply puzzled. You must read every one of those letters, Louis, and possibly they will throw some light upon the matter."

"I will; but I shall have to send for them, for I left all the things I brought home from New Hampshire at Mr. Weston's. I have never had occasion to use anything excepting some of my father's books while I was in college, and, knowing I should not need them here, I left them at home. But how would it do to go to Mr. Sherburne, state the case frankly to him, and ask him to explain the mystery to us?" the young man thoughtfully proposed.

"I had thought of that myself, for, as you know, I believe in straightforward dealing," Miss Wellington replied; "but something tells me to move cautiously. I think we will study the situation for awhile—at any rate until you have read those letters."

“Very well; I have always found it wise to rely upon your judgment,” was the smiling response; “and now I think——”

“Wait,” said Miss Wellington, laying a detaining hand upon his arm as he was about to rise. “I heard Mr. Sherburne just come in. I would like you two to meet.”

A minute later the gentleman entered the room.

“Ah, Mr. Sherburne, you are a little early this afternoon,” Miss Wellington observed, as both she and Louis arose at his approach. “This is opportune, for I would like to have you meet ‘my boy,’ of whom you have so often heard me speak—Mr. Louis Arnold, Mr. Sherburne.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE two men experienced a simultaneous shock as they looked into each other's face. Louis instantly recognized the gentleman who had accosted him on the grounds at the county fair, ten years previous, and who had so generously supplied him with peanuts upon that occasion, while Mr. Sherburne, as he now searched the young man's frank, open countenance, which had changed but little, except to mature in contour and intelligence, knew him to be the identical boy who had so startled him on that same day, and awakened in his long-dormant conscience a sense of mingled fear and guilt, and also of impending evil.

But John Sherburne, after the first thrill of confirmation had passed, cordially grasped the hand Louis extended to him, and courteously expressed his pleasure upon making the acquaintance of Miss Wellington's protégé.

At the same time he could not quite conceal from the alertly observant eyes of his housekeeper his perturbation upon being again confronted by this portentous reminder of a certain event in his career which he fain would have obliterated from his consciousness; and the woman was confirmed in her previous conviction that the man was in possession of some

secret which in some way involved the interests of her dear boy.

Yet Mr. Sherburne quickly recovered himself, and, inviting Louis to be seated again, engaged him in conversation and kept him talking for another half hour, drawing him out upon his life in college, plying him with questions regarding his plans for the future—what line of business he preferred, where he intended to locate, etc. Miss Wellington was quick to observe that when Louis mentioned that he had come to Chicago to make a start in life a shade of annoyance flitted over Mr. Sherburne's face; while some of the radically honest ideas which the younger man expressed, as they were discussing certain prevailing business methods, appeared to smite the elder upon a sensitive spot, even causing him to change color two or three times.

After Louis' departure John Sherburne, a gloomy frown upon his brow, retired to his library, where he sat for a long time in deep thought. It was evident that his reflections were not of a pleasant nature, for his face was overcast, his eyes heavy and anxious, and now and then he muttered nervously to himself.

At length he arose, went to his safe, and from an inner compartment brought forth an official-looking envelope. Going back to his desk he drew out a time-yellowed document, which he carefully examined, a very disagreeable expression of mingled anxiety, perplexity and cupidity settling upon his countenance.

Finally he pushed it from him with an angry ges-

ture, that had something of the petulance of a child in it.

"I thought this affair was dead and buried ages ago," he burst forth. "I never dreamed of being confronted by its ghost—aye, something more substantial than a ghost, if I am not mistaken. I did not suppose I should ever need give it another thought. I wonder if it would be best to destroy it now?" he concluded reflectively. He sat for some time considering this proposition, then finally resumed:

"If I do reduce it to ashes, then should want to go back to the old country by and by, I might need it and regret not having kept it. No one knows I have it—at least no one who could possibly have any interest in it; no one ever has access to my safe, so I think I will risk it."

And having come to this decision, John Sherburne refolded and replaced the parchment in the envelope and restored it to its compartment in his safe, after which, assuming his usual genial manner, but with a cunning, steel-like glint in his eyes, he sauntered into the family sitting-room and joined his housekeeper, whom he found cosily ensconced in a comfortable rocker, and reading the evening paper in the rosy glow of the crimson-shaded lamp upon the table.

They often met here a little before dinner, if he chanced to come in early, and chatted socially upon various matters.

"That is a fine young man who called upon you

this afternoon, Miss Wellington; you have a right to be proud of your 'boy,'" Mr. Sherburne remarked, as he drew a chair opposite her and sat down. "He called you 'Aunt Martha.' Is he really your nephew?"

"No," replied Miss Wellington; "he is in no way related to me by the tie of blood; but he is a dear boy whom I took to my home and cared for after he was left an orphan, to save him from the poor-house. He was with me two years—until I was called West," and she briefly gave him an outline of Louis' history from that time. She had never said much about him before, except incidentally.

"Then you knew his father and mother? Were they reared in your town?" pursued the gentleman, trying to appear indifferently matter-of-fact, but with an undercurrent of eagerness which his companion, her suspicions still on the alert, detected, notwithstanding.

"No, they did not come there to live until after their marriage," she said, then added, as she bent a direct look upon him: "Mr. Arnold was a Massachusetts man, but his wife was English."

"Ah!" and his tone was a trifle sharp as if from anxiety, "I'm English myself, as you are aware. Do you know what part of England Mrs. Arnold came from?"

"No, I merely know the fact. Although our acquaintance covered a number of years, Mrs. Arnold very rarely referred to her past; she once mentioned that her father died when she was quite young, and,

soon after, she and her mother came to this country to live; and"—as if this had occurred to her as an afterthought—"her maiden name was Judkins."

John Sherburne gave a nervous start; then, to cover it, leaned forward to turn the light a trifle lower.

That name had not fallen upon his ears since that day of the county fair when he had questioned Louis upon the same subject; and now he secretly anathematized himself because it had power to make such a coward of him.

"Young Arnold appears to be bright and energetic—straightforward, too," he observed, after an interval of silence, but with a slight shrug as he mentioned the latter virtue. "I suppose he would like to get started in something pretty soon."

"He said he would take the first honorable position that offered," Miss Wellington replied.

"Regardless of salary?" queried her companion, with a smile.

"I think his object is to get a start, then prove himself worthy of adequate compensation."

"U—m; I believe he would, too," said Mr. Sherburne, with an affirmative nod.

"I know he would be faithful in whatever he attempted; he has always been very conscientious," Miss Wellington affirmed confidently.

"He certainly is an honor to your early training, madam. What a pity it is that such women as you cannot have the molding of a large family of boys—the world would soon be a much better place than it

is," and with what sounded like a quickly repressed sigh Mr. Sherburne bestowed a look of respectful esteem upon the gentle face opposite him, and which bore the unmistakable stamp of nobility, purity, and refinement.

"By the way," he added, an instant later, as he drew a letter from his pocket, "I heard from my niece to-day. She, too, is getting rather insistent regarding a position, and is thinking of cutting her visits short to come here and help me in my quest for her. I suppose it does not matter to you when she comes."

"No, indeed; I shall be glad to see Miss Ashton again. I was quite attracted to her during her last visit to Mrs. Sherburne in Colorado," Miss Wellington responded in a cordial tone.

"You are sure this change in her plans will not interfere in any way with your own?" queried the gentleman, who was always considerate of his household.

"Not in the least. I did intend, as you know, to go East to make Louis a visit this summer; but since he has come here to live I do not care for the trip. I love young people, and would like a house full of them."

Mr. Sherburne sighed audibly now. He also had yearned all his life for a house full of young people. It had been a great disappointment to both himself and his wife that no children came to them; hence they had always made much of Mrs. Sherburne's niece—Josephine Ashton. But the man's softer

mood was of short duration. He had met with an unexpected facer that afternoon in the coming of Louis—one which seemed to point to danger ahead unless he were wary in strengthening his defenses; and as he sat in his library after the young man's departure, studying the situation, a plan had come to him by means of which he thought he could do this.

It was not a good or a clean scheme, and he was secretly conscious, even while considering it, that he was only plunging himself deeper in the mire of wrongdoing into which he had waded in making his first venture in life. But fortune and position had ever been his gods, and having attained them, "by hook or by crook," he had no intention of jeopardizing them at this late day.

A few days after the above conversation Louis received a communication from Mr. Sherburne in which he asked for a personal interview, and stated that he had an opening which, after talking over the conditions, he might think would do for a beginning.

Under the circumstances this proposition came as a surprise to Louis, and his first impulse had been to politely reject it, even without the formality of an interview. After recovering his photographs and the talk that had followed with Miss Wellington, he had not been at all attracted to John Sherburne, notwithstanding that gentleman had accorded him the utmost courtesy. He felt that there was something very strange connected with Mr. Sherburne's claiming them as family pictures; while, too, in spite of

his affability, he himself had not seemed to ring quite true.

At the same time he was anxious to get into business—to be “doing something”—and, after consulting Mr. Richards, who, although he knew nothing about the man personally, thought there could be no harm in looking into the matter, he went at once to Mr. Sherburne’s place of business, which he found to be in a handsome building located in one of the finest streets in the mercantile portion of the city.

He was very cordially received, and after half an hour’s talk with his prospective employer he found much of his prejudice melting away; and before the interview closed he agreed to accept the position at a salary which he regarded as very liberal, considering he was just beginning.

Mr. Richards also thought him very fortunate in this respect, but suggested that Mr. Sherburne might have been influenced somewhat by his regard for Miss Wellington in manifesting this unusual interest in him.

Miss Wellington herself, however, looked rather grave upon being informed of the arrangement.

“There is something about it which I do not understand,” she affirmed, when thinking it over alone. “I am convinced that Mr. Sherburne knows something about either Louis or his family which he is anxious to conceal. He is English, Mrs. Arnold’s parents were English, and I am impressed that there may have been a wrong done some time in the past for which he is now trying to salve his conscience, perhaps.”

She began to study him more carefully; to weigh his motives, his words and acts. He had always appeared to be a kind man; was generous to a fault in household matters, a devoted husband to the last hour of his wife's life, and very considerate of the help in his family, especially so in connection with herself.

What his business methods were she had no means of knowing. She had been told that he was accounted a rich man, and had heard him boast that he had made his own way, unaided, up fortune's ladder.

Still, since the affair of the photographs, she had felt an increasing distrust of him, and now this unusual business proposition to Louis only served to multiply her suspicions. She found herself growing anxious lest her "boy," under his influence, should become so entangled in his business methods, if they were not honest, that he would be tempted out of an absolutely straightforward career by the glitter of gold.

Then there followed a twinge of self-condemnation in view of such uncharitable suspicion and unworthy doubt. "What are you doing, Martha Wellington?" she demanded sharply of herself. "You have no business to wrong your neighbor even in thought, or cast the shadow of such a fear over the foster-child who has stood so nobly all these years. He is true as steel, and I know that God, who has hitherto been his shield, will keep him true."

Louis entered upon his duties with enthusiasm, for at last he was really launched upon the world

to do battle for himself. He found his work congenial, and it brought him into contact with bright, intelligent, wide-awake people.

He found that Mr. Sherburne was a broker and promoter on an extensive scale, and he had been assigned to the position of confidential clerk and messenger, a berth which had been held for many years by a man who, like himself, had gone to his employer as a youngster and grown up with him.

He wondered that, in his inexperience, he had been selected for so responsible a place; but after two or three months it dawned upon him, little by little, that it was because of this very fact he had been wanted—that he might be the more easily manipulated and molded to the man's will and his methods, which were far from being straightforward, and not infrequently were downright dishonest.

He was appalled one day when, after carefully studying the plan of a new venture and receiving from Mr. Sherburne his instructions how to handle it in talking it up to possible purchasers, he became convinced that he was being used as a cat's paw in an absolute fraud, cleverly planned to catch the unwary and bring quick and large returns into the promoter's pockets.

With a sinking heart he pushed both the plan and the typewritten sheets away from him, while his mouth settled into a stern, resolute line, and his eyes grew clouded and anxious.

He dropped his head upon his hand and did some very hard thinking in a very few minutes.

He asked himself what he should do; then smiled at the question, since before it was formulated in his mind he had already known what he must do—the only right thing to do. A moment later he was standing, tall and straight, before his employer, the obnoxious papers in his hand.

“Mr. Sherburne,” he began, “these plans and what I know about the matter do not correspond with your instructions.”

“Well?” briefly inquired the man.

“How can you expect me to talk up and sell stock in what doesn’t exist?”

“I beg your pardon, the ‘Bellmont’ does exist,” suavely corrected the promoter. “The mine is there, the copper is there, and plenty of it.”

“Yes, but it isn’t fairly opened up yet,” objected Louis.

“True; but it will be *when*—we get sufficient money in hand to warrant it.”

The slight emphasis on the adverb, with the pause following, were abhorrently suggestive to the listener.

“But—you know what I mean, Mr. Sherburne—I should have to tell no end of falsehoods in talking it up as you have directed,” said Louis, with a gesture of repulsion.

“Well, the story might seem a little premature, if people knew just how things are to-day; but when everything gets to running nicely, and the ore is piling up on the surface, it would be true enough, wouldn’t it?” his employer craftily argued.

“And *when* is all this to occur?” demanded the

younger man, with a direct look which, in spite of his hardihood, brought a hot wave to the other's cheek.

"Oh, Arnold, you mustn't get squeamish." Mr. Sherburne tried to speak lightly, but he hitched nervously in his chair, then added: "There are tricks in all trades, you know."

" 'Tricks! ' " repeated Louis, in an indescribable tone.

"Well, I admit that is not a pleasant word," said Mr. Sherburne, his eyes wavering beneath the look in those that were regarding him so searchingly. "Perhaps if I had said there are to-day certain *systems* in operation which seem necessary in order to compete successfully in the business world, it would not have sounded so objectionable to your unaccustomed ears," he concluded, with a perceptible sneer.

"But I don't see——" the young man began, when his companion interrupted him somewhat sharply.

"You don't need to 'see'; all you have to do is to obey orders, and I will shoulder the responsibility," he said. "You are a very convincing talker, Arnold, and you have met with unusual success thus far, for a greenhorn. Now you just go ahead according to those instructions, and I will see that you have no cause to regret it."

Louis took a step forward and laid the papers he held upon the man's desk.

"I came here to follow instructions, Mr. Sherburne, and with the determination to devote my best energies to you and your interests, hoping thus to

promote my own. But I expected to receive only honorable instructions, which would in no way tend to rob me of my self-respect——”

“Bah! Louis, don’t preach,” was the impatient interruption.

“Pardon me, Mr. Sherburne, I had no intention of reading you a sermon,” he said, flushing, “but this much more I must say—I will never lie, or steal, or cheat, to make money for myself or any other man. I mean to rise in the world. I mean to become a successful business man; but I will never build up my own fortune by robbing my neighbor, who has just as much right to a share of the good things of life as I have.”

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN SHERBURNE sat with downcast eyes and clouded brow while Louis bravely voiced his uncompromising attitude regarding the revolting theory that a man must become a beast of prey in order to make his life a success. There was a curious expression on his face, too, which betrayed that he was not wholly unmoved by the noble-spirited words of the young man. His fluctuating color and a slight twitching of his lips told that there was yet a vital spark remaining in a conscience repeatedly cauterized by willful and persistent wrongdoing.

But as Louis ceased speaking Mr. Sherburne threw back his head with a restive air, while his lips parted in a sneer that unpleasantly revealed his strong and still perfect teeth.

"So you expect to go through life unsmirched by human frailties!" he caustically retorted. "Truly, you have set a high standard for yourself. It all sounds very fine, Arnold," he went on coldly, but with an underlying thrill of anger in his tone, "and it is, perhaps, what I might have expected from you; but when you presume to criticise and combat established methods and systems, which the smartest business men of the world have indorsed, you have set yourself against a mighty and resistless tide. I don't deny that there is an element of sharp practice in

my business; but I am no worse than my neighbors, and, mark my words, young man, you will yet be driven to use your own wits or you will never succeed in life."

"If by using my wits you mean taking a dishonorable advantage of others, I shall indeed never know the import of the word success," Louis returned in an inflexible tone. "I would rather possess the consciousness that I am an honest man than all the money in Chicago!"

"No doubt that is a very praiseworthy sentiment; but you can't live up to it and amount to anything—nobody can the way the world is going these days," said Mr. Sherburne sharply.

"I am going to try," was the briefly quiet response.

"But don't you believe that people should receive in proportion to their ability—that some kinds of labor and talent are worth more than others, and those who incur heavy responsibilities and large risks should reap accordingly?" demanded the broker.

"Yes; but that is a principle which, because there is no organized way of justly enforcing it, is subject to unlimited abuse," said Louis thoughtfully. "For instance: a college friend of mine, who was working his own way and having the hardest kind of a grind, got a cinder in his eye. We went to a near-by drug-store for help, but the druggist failed to remove it and directed us to a noted specialist around the corner. We sought him, and in less than two minutes the offending particle was dislodged. My friend drew out his wallet and asked what was to pay.

‘Ten dollars.’ ‘I can’t do it,’ said Bob; ‘it’s too much.’ All he had in the world just then was a five-dollar bill and a little change. ‘That is my price,’ frigidly returned the great man. I indignantly came to the rescue with the result that the specialist took Bob’s bill, yet made him feel like a beggar as he paid it, when one dollar would have been ample remuneration for the service. Another case: A surgeon performed an operation which took exactly one hour of his time and demanded a thousand dollars as his fee.”

“But that was for skill—the ‘know how’—and the responsibility. Besides, professional men spend years and a good deal of money preparing for their work,” opposed Mr. Sherburne.

“True, the skill and responsibility were worth a great deal in this case, and the surgeon should have been paid accordingly; but the amount charged was extortion. Yet such unjust demands as these are not to be compared to many swindling schemes that are continually multiplying to rob not only the unwary rich, but hard-working men and women, of their all, and fill the pockets of sharpers. It is a kind of success—if it can be so termed—that I do not desire, and I believe there *are* men who, to-day, are making good money honestly. They may not get rich as fast as those who sell bogus stocks, and overreach people in many other ways; but, with what they do accumulate, they at least have a clean conscience. Mr. Sherburne, I am going to cast my lot in with that happier minority.”

As Louis ceased speaking Mr. Sherburne sprang to his feet and nervously paced the length of the room three or four times, for not a few of the young man's arrows had shot home with stinging effect, and a sudden longing swept over his heart. He realized that a great opportunity had presented itself—not only to right a great wrong, but to abandon the dangerous craft in which he had so long sailed the treacherous seas of speculation; change his questionable methods, ally himself with this clean, enterprising, straightforward fellow, and so silence forever the crafty demon within him, and add one more to the "happier minority" who would help to make the world a better and a brighter place.

Secretly he was often weary of his life and its aims—love of excitement, social position, and the insatiable pursuit of wealth—for they were evanescent, temporal; some time they must be left behind; then *what* would he have for eternity?

Arguments of this nature had begun to haunt him only since his wife's death and the advent of Martha Wellington, with her lofty principles and their practical application in her daily living; her purity of thought, integrity of purpose, and love for humanity. Were they not more to be desired than all his gold?

These were some of the thoughts—messengers from a higher atmosphere—which now flashed through his mind as he restlessly paced his office.

He longed to break the shackles that bound him.

Should he heed this inward yearning, newly awak-

ened by the words and attitude of his high-minded clerk?

But the cost! Confession, humiliation, and the surrender of the golden calf he had worshiped for a lifetime!

He paused, straightened himself, his face suddenly hardening; then he wheeled around and faced his companion again.

"Well?" Just one word, questioningly uttered, but there was a volume of meaning in it.

Louis understood.

"Yes, it will be better so," he said. "You have your systems to maintain. I have my honor to preserve. The two will not work together, and I shall have to find a berth elsewhere."

"Very well, Arnold; just as you please," Mr. Sherburne coolly returned. He resumed his seat, opened his check-book, and made out a check for the amount of Louis' salary to date.

The young man quietly put his desk in order, gathering together what few things belonged to him personally, then reached for his hat to go.

"This, I believe, will square accounts between us," his employer observed, pushing the slip of paper toward Louis. "It is rather short notice, however," he supplemented in an injured tone.

"But I cannot follow the instructions you have given me for to-day, Mr. Sherburne; still, if there is any other work or writing you wish done, I will gladly remain until you can get some one else," Louis obligingly replied.

"No; it is this special matter which presses just now; so, if you can't attend to that, we may as well cry quits first as last," was the curt response.

Louis picked up the check, read the amount, thought a moment, then transferred it to his wallet. He believed he had honestly earned it; for, although he had known for some time that Mr. Sherburne's methods were not always honorable, he had not, up to that time, been obliged to mix in them in any way.

He thanked him courteously, then inquired, as he drew on his gloves:

"Can I do anything for you, sir, on my way down town?"

"No, thank you; good morning, Arnold," and the summarily dismissed clerk politely responded, and went his way.

Once out upon the street Louis felt almost dazed by the suddenness of the change in his prospects. During the last few months life had begun to look very bright to him, because he believed he was well started upon a promising career, and he had put all his energy, all his enthusiasm into his work; and now he was an outcast—an outcast from choice and principle, it is true, and he had not a single regret for the step he had taken.

But the situation was not inspiring, and for a block or two he looked grave and somewhat anxious. Then his face lighted.

"This won't do," he said, giving himself a shake, "and the old rule will work as well now as it ever did

—‘God will take care of it,’ and I’m sure there is a place and work for me somewhere.”

He knew that he was more than welcome to remain with Mr. Richards until something favorable offered, and that his friend would use his influence in every possible way to aid him in his search. But his cheeks flamed hotly as this thought presented itself to him.

“I cannot be dependent upon him any longer, and I will not take my troubles to anyone,” he said, with a resolute tightening of his lips. “I will say nothing about this until after I get located again.”

So he went and came as usual for the next few days, while he spent his time studying the newspapers and answering advertisements.

It seemed a thankless task, however, and he began to carry a heavy heart before the week was out, as he was curtly turned away from place after place. He did not go to see Miss Wellington, as usual, for he knew she would be quick to discern that things were not going well with him, and he did not wish to burden her. He felt quite sure that Mr. Sherburne had not informed her of the break between them, because he knew he would have heard from her immediately if such had been the case.

One morning he found this brief but comprehensive advertisement in one of the dailies:

“WANTED—To fill a vacancy, an active, honest young man; good penman, good accountant, and not afraid to rough it. Apply in person to J. Bushkirk, No. 40 — St.”

"That means hard work and close application," mused Louis, as he read it over the second time. "The man who inserted it is a straightforward character—knows what he wants, and isn't given to mincing matters. I like the sound of it, and I'll look it up."

He at once bent his steps toward the locality and address given, and finally walked into a modest office on the ground floor of an unpretentious building, which bore over the entrance the equally unassuming sign: "J. Bushkirk, Lumber."

There were several clerks in the room, of one of whom Louis inquired for the proprietor. He was directed to an inner office at the rear, and presently found himself in the presence of a vigorous, middle-aged, shrewd-looking man, who glanced up alertly from the pile of letters and bills on the desk before him as Louis entered.

"Good morning," he brusquely observed, while his keen glance searched the face of the young man. "What can I do for you?"

"I have come to inquire about this ad. I am out of a position and in search of one," said Louis, coming directly to the point, at the same time laying the neatly clipped paragraph before the gentleman.

"Well, can you fill the bill?" bluntly demanded the lumber merchant, without removing his piercing eyes from the prepossessing young applicant.

Louis' white, even teeth gleamed for an instant in a smile of amusement.

"That remains to be proven, sir," he respectfully

returned, while, with his fountain pen, he rapidly wrote his name and address upon a leaf from his note-book and laid it beside the advertisement. "There is a specimen of my penmanship; I am fairly good at figures; honest I certainly wish and intend to be, and I am not afraid of hard work that will bring me a just equivalent."

"That is straight from the shoulder, young man," said the merchant, an appreciative twinkle leaping into his eyes. "I like plain talk. Now I am a lumber dealer, as you doubtless observed when you came in. I have vessels that are constantly bringing in large loads from the forests of Michigan, where I have several sawmills running day and night. I am in need of a clerk, and he will find plenty to do, both in the office and out; for there are times when I want him to go into the woods and mills with me for a week or two at a time, and where we have to put up with limited accommodations and homely fare. It is tough work at times, especially when the weather is rough; yet there's a spice of adventure and novelty about it that might not be objectionable to the right kind of fellow. Now, if you wish to give the berth a trial, and can show me satisfactory credentials, we'll talk more about the details. Oh, by the way, I forgot about the 'just equivalent,'" he interposed, with a comical quirk of an eye. "The pay will be fifteen dollars a week for the first three months. At the end of that time, if everything goes O. K., I'll raise you according to your ability. That's all. Now it's up to you."

Louis liked the man in spite of his brusqueness. He knew there was good money to be made in the lumber business, and the place, even though the pay was small and the work rough and laborious, might lead to something very desirable in the future.

He arrived at quick conclusions after a minute of rapid thinking, during which his companion continued to watch him curiously.

"I think I would like to come to you, Mr. Bushkirk," he said. "I will try to make myself useful to you for three months, and we will both know by that time whether I can meet your requirements, and whether I shall find it to my interest to go on. I can give you for reference William Richards, attorney——"

"I know him," the man broke in, a note of satisfaction in his tones. "He has been my lawyer for years—a fine, solid man he is, too."

"He is my guardian," quietly observed Louis.

"That is all I need to know, Mr. Arnold. Now, when will you start in?" and the merchant's cordial tone indicated that he was well pleased, even anxious to put his new clerk to the test.

"When will you need me?" Louis inquired.

"Now—this minute; I'm driven to death with orders. But I can wait a day or two if——"

"No, sir. I have nothing to do, and I would be only too glad to begin 'this minute,'" the young man interposed, with smiling alacrity, "and you can set me at something as soon as you please."

"That's the talk," rejoined Mr. Bushkirk briskly,

adding, as he began to shuffle together some papers: "There's a desk for you over by the window, and here is a pile of orders I want inventoried in this book. Go ahead now and let's see what you can do."

So Louis entered at once upon his labors, and found that there was indeed plenty to do.

He went home that night buoyant and happy. After dinner he gave his friends a history of the experiences of the past week, and was warmly commended by them for the stand he had taken with Mr. Sherburne.

"But why did you not confide in me, Louis, and let me help you?" Mr. Richards inquired, with a note of reproof in his voice. "You must not ignore your friends when you are in trouble."

"I wanted to try my own wings, sir," said Louis, smiling frankly into his guardian's face. "I have my own row to hoe—you have been more than good to me all these years—and the sooner I begin to look out for myself the sooner I shall ascertain what I am good for."

"I like your independence, my boy," approvingly replied his friend.

"And I like your integrity, Louis," Mrs. Richards here remarked, giving him an affectionate glance. "You know we are told: 'He that walketh uprightly walketh surely.'"

"But what does a man really amount to if he isn't honest?" the young man gravely responded. "Nobody respects him. He cannot respect himself, for

what he has accumulated by overreaching others doesn't actually belong to him, and, like Christian with his pack, he must continually carry that consciousness around with him as long as he lives. To my thinking it doesn't pay."

"Neither has such an individual any right to claim that he is a man," observed Mrs. Richards reflectively.

"What would you call him, Helen?" inquired Farmer Weston, who with his good wife had come to spend the winter with their daughter.

"'God made man in his own image,'" she quoted, "and to my understanding one is never a 'man' only in so far as he is Godlike—that is, as he manifests or reflects the graces and attributes of God."

Louis glanced at her, nodded and smiled, thus indicating his full sympathy with her concept of man, and with a look in his dark eyes that reminded Mr. Weston of certain discussions he had with him as a boy, and which had begun, even then, to weaken his old theological armor at certain points.

"Then your concept of man, Helen, is character, not a personality," he observed, after considering her definition for a moment or two.

"Exactly. The term 'man' has been sadly perverted," she replied. "We speak of the 'nobility of England'; but what a corruption of the title! It certainly is a misnomer. There are doubtless some good men among the nobility, but many in its ranks are anything but truly noble."

"Then, if perfect character alone was God's cre-

ation which He named man, what, according to your theory, are we who inhabit this mundane sphere?" inquired the farmer.

"We are"—she nodded roguishly at him as she paused to give emphasis to her words—"supposititious."

The man sat erect as a new thought came to him.

"Make-believes?" he said, as if he had been jarred a trifle.

"That is just what we are—pretentious atoms who have assumed a title that does not rightly belong to us," his daughter returned, her lovely face growing earnest and thoughtful. She picked up a pencil from the table, and making a character upon a piece of paper, passed it to him.

"What is that, father?" she inquired.

"The number two," he answered.

"Is it?" she said, with lifted brows.

"Well, to be exact, it is the *figure* two," he returned, with a smile. "Ah!" he added alertly with the next breath, "I get your point now. You make a distinction between the figure and the number. The figure stands for your 'supposititious' man, your 'pretentious atom'; the number represents God's perfect man, for a number can never be anything but perfect, while figures can be whatever you happen to make them, and they are always the counterfeit, never the real thing. Now to carry the illustration a little further, a number never becomes a figure, and *vice versa*. How are you going to make that prac-

tical in human affairs, Helen? How are you going to get at your perfect man?"

"When you understand what numbers really are you no longer need the figures to represent them—you erase them," Mrs. Richards replied. "You might hear various numbers mentioned, and you would never fail to recognize them apart from their symbols. In the same way, if we know what God's man really is we recognize the perfect character as man rather than this imperfect physique, which, eventually, must also be erased, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, you know. But there is a spark, a ray of divine intelligence, goodness and love in every human consciousness; and as this is allowed to grow—to control and transform that consciousness—the full stature of the perfect man finally appears."

"But how——" Mr. Weston began in a perplexed tone, when his daughter laughingly interrupted him.

"Father dear, don't try to go any deeper until you have thoroughly sounded the waters you are in," she said. "You might get beyond your depth and lose your bearings. If, with your sounding-line busy—keep on almost seemed like coming to her and the 'little book,' him so thoughtful of her. She appealed."

"And, Mr. Weston," observed Mr. Weston, after a short silence.

"Yes; although it is but a very small part of it," replied his daughter, with luminous eyes.

"Well—on the whole, I believe I'm growing to like it," the man asserted, to the astonishment of his

listeners. "That there is good logic in it I can't deny; and, with such conscientious exponents as you, Louis and Miss Wellington are, it is certainly attractive from the viewpoint of character-building. You've cracked some nuts for me to-night, Helen, on which I've been hammering for years without getting at their kernel."

"Yes, and there are a good many more in your theological basket, father, that will have to come under the hammer of truth in the same way," was the laughing retort.

"I—shouldn't—wonder," he gravely responded, which was an unlooked-for and rather startling admission coming from such a source. Then turning to Louis, with a gleam of mingled affection and pride in his eyes, he continued: "Your definition of an honest man, my boy, has led into quite a metaphysical discussion. You have great cause to be grateful for those early years that you spent with that good woman—Miss Martha Wellington."

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CHAPTER XVIII

DURING the week that had elapsed since Louis severed his connection with Mr. Sherburne, some interesting and even startling incidents had occurred to demand that gentleman's attention.

In the first place, Josephine Ashton arrived, and with her advent the house began to seem a different place. It certainly was very enjoyable to have a bright, pretty girl, full of life and spirits, around, and Mr. Sherburne manifested his delight in every possible way.

He had previously given orders to have two rooms, on the same floor with Miss Wellington, arranged for her use, and had exhibited far more interest in making them attractive than he had ever shown before in anything relating to his home since the loss of his wife.

Josephine was keenly appreciative of his kindness, and told him, with tears in her eyes, that it almost seemed like coming to her own home to have him so thoughtful of her. She appeared to be delighted to find Miss Wellington at the head of the house.

"I began to love you, Miss Wellington, when I first met you, out in Colorado, during my last visit to auntie; and now it gives me a real cozy feeling

to have you here," she told the housekeeper when she went to her room to have a little chat before going to bed on the night of her arrival.

"Thank you, dear. I can understand that it would be a little hard for you to find an utter stranger here, and, as I am fond of young people, I have been looking forward with pleasure to your coming," Miss Wellington replied with a genial smile.

Mr. Sherburne seemed to grow young with her advent, and exerted himself to give her a good time, while he seldom returned from his business at night without bringing her some token of remembrance.

Finally Josephine laughingly told him he must stop, or he would spoil her for earning her own living, for, as a hard-working schoolma'am with a moderate salary, she could not afford to indulge in such luxuries.

"Well, I haven't got track of any school for you yet," he told her, a sly smile hovering about his lips. Then he added as if the thought had just struck him: "You have been at your books for a long time, Josie. Suppose you rest and make me a visit for a year or so, and we'll 'paint the town red,' as the boys say."

"Why, Uncle John, what a tempter you are!" she retorted in laughing reproof. "I'm afraid by the time the year was out you would have indulged me to the point where I should not want to teach at all. No, sir, I have got to be up and doing. I am getting quite anxious to know how it feels to be earning money for oneself."

One evening, during dinner, she turned to Miss Wellington and remarked, her color deepening as she did so:

"I have heard that Louis Arnold has come to Chicago to live. Doesn't he ever come to see you?"

A slight cloud flitted over Miss Wellington's face at the question.

"Yes, indeed, he used to come every few days; but it is more than a week now since I have seen him, and I am beginning to wonder why. Louis is a clerk in your uncle's office. Has he not told you?" Then turning to Mr. Sherburne she inquired: "How is my boy getting on?"

Mr. Sherburne flushed. He had imagined that the young man had confided in Miss Wellington before this, and had expected she would speak of the change and comment upon the stand he had taken.

He now felt obliged to explain the situation, which he did in a way to make it appear that Louis had been squeamish and hypercritical in his judgment of his business methods. He prophesied, in conclusion, that Louis would find he had a hard row to hoe if he expected to go through life and never strain a point when he came in contact with other business men.

There was an awkward pause when he concluded. Miss Wellington's face wore an inscrutable expression, and Josephine looked grave upon learning that her guardian and Louis were at variance.

She had been wondering why he did not call.

She had been looking forward to meeting him again, and now she began to fear that this break might keep him away altogether.

"What do you mean by 'straining a point'?" Miss Wellington finally inquired. "Do you mean to imply that a man cannot be successful in business without being dishonest?"

"That doesn't sound very well, does it?" Mr. Sherburne returned with a forced laugh, and bestowing a covert glance upon his ward. "But, in these days of close competition and fierce struggles to make money, I believe—and I have heard others say the same thing—it is next to impossible to get along without using some sharp practice in business. Now, Miss Wellington, will quote Scripture to me," he concluded turning to Josephine and trying to make light of the subject.

"I certainly shall," promptly responded the housekeeper in a positive tone, yet with a gentleness which robbed her words of any intentional venom. "'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 'Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor nor rob him.''" What are we going to do with such commands as these? Can they be violated with impunity? Men may flourish for a little season upon ill-gotten wealth—may think they have achieved a notable triumph in attaining financial success; but have they, really? Is there any *real* satisfaction in heaping up gold by robbing one's neighbor? Surely not, for a day of reckoning is

inevitable when every wrong must be expiated."

As he listened John Sherburne seemed to see unfolding before him a panorama of his whole life and its results. In his youth he had begun to dream of becoming a rich man. Later he had vowed he would fulfil that dream, and he had made good that vow. He had become a rich man, according to the world's interpretation of the term, and he had spent lavishly, gratifying his every desire and believed himself satisfied with results, happy in his possessions; and prided himself upon being the wonderful magician who had achieved it. Never until the day of his first meeting with Louis had he viewed his prosperity with anything save the utmost complacency. Then as he had looked into the boy's great brown eyes, so like another pair he recalled but too well, there had arisen a ghostly memory which had never ceased to haunt him.

From that hour there had gradually crept into his consciousness a sense of dissatisfaction and unrest; while an accusing voice seemed continually demanding: "John Sherburne, *how* have you attained the goal you have so coveted?"

To-day that question had been answered in words of Holy Writ. He knew that he had "stolen," he had "dealt falsely," he had "defrauded and robbed his neighbor."

Not as a common thief, however, who could be arraigned and convicted: oh, no; he had done nothing so plebeian as that. The gigantic schemes,

wholesale swindling and shrewd manipulations which the world winks at, so long as the operator makes no false moves and evades the law, could not be classed under that ugly term.

Yet he could recall instances of men ruined in business and thus robbed of the ability to make a living; of the widow and fatherless defrauded by bogus investments; of clerks and laborers made penniless, their hard earnings swallowed up by diabolical "methods" and "systems" cunningly devised to feed his own insatiable greed and that of others like him.

It was not a pleasant retrospective view, and he found himself wondering if those last words uttered by Miss Wellington—"A day of reckoning is inevitable, when every wrong must be expiated"—would ever cease to beat their ominous refrain upon his brain.

"You are very uncompromising in your attitude, Miss Wellington," Mr. Sherburne observed in a would-be-tolerant tone. Then, feeling uncomfortably conscious of the clear, grave eyes regarding him, he turned to his niece to avoid them, and smilingly inquired:

"What have you to say upon the subject, Josie?"

Josephine colored vividly as she replied:

"It was sharp practice that ruined papa, you know, Uncle John. Those agents just mesmerized him into buying a lot of that mining stock, and he lost every dollar that he put into it."

"True; that was a very unfortunate experience,

my dear," Mr. Sherburne returned while he nervously crumbled a bit of bread with his fingers. "But," he added, "your father should not have trusted his own judgment; he should have had advice that I would gladly have given him."

"He realized that when it was too late; but he never got over it," said Josephine sadly.

"Well, it is pretty hard on you, too," observed the gentleman, regarding her affectionately.

"I would rather be as I am than in the place of those brokers; they can't be very happy," gravely rejoined the girl.

"They don't care a rap. They were after the money and they got it." Mr. Sherburne did not realize the full significance of his remark until it was voiced. Then it came to him, with an inward shock, that out of his own mouth he had condemned himself; for, all his life, he had never "cared a rap" about the losses of his victims so long as his coffers were filled. But he changed the subject after a moment or two of awkward silence, and, as soon as dinner was over, went directly to his library, where he spent a very uncomfortable evening, while Josephine and Miss Wellington had a delightful call from Louis, without Mr. Sherburne suspecting the young man's presence in the house.

John Sherburne did not sleep well after retiring. That ominous refrain about the "inevitable day of reckoning" haunted him the whole night through, and he arose the next morning nervous and irritable. It galled him exceedingly, too, to feel that he had

been weighed in the balance and found wanting by Miss Wellington and Josephine. The former he thoroughly respected, the latter he loved; and he shrank from forfeiting the esteem of either, although he knew they did not dream to what extent he had carried his sharp practices.

But he had a very good day. Business was brisk; and certain stocks which he held took quite a leap, consequently he found himself in a much better frame of mind when the hour for closing his office arrived and he started for home.

He saw his car just rounding the corner as he came out of the building, so had to wait for another. He bought a paper and began to glance over the headlines. While thus engaged he became conscious that some one had paused beside him and was regarding him curiously.

With an impatient shrug he turned to look at the man, when suddenly everything appeared to come to a stop. His heart, his pulse, his breath, even his sight seemed to fail him as he stared blankly back into the eyes that were bent with searching scrutiny upon his face.

"By the powers! If it isn't Nate Judkins! It's many a year since you and I last saw each other, and you've changed so I hardly knew you," the stranger burst forth, yet with a note of doubt in his tones which the other was quick to catch. The sound of his voice broke the uncanny spell that had almost paralyzed the broker, and things began to move again.

John Sherburne was a man not easily thrown off his guard; he had been in too many tight places during his eventful life not to have himself pretty well under control, even midst the most trying circumstances. Hence, while the man was speaking, he had taken a rapid survey of the situation from various points of view. His self-poise began to return, and, by the time the stranger ceased speaking, he was ready to cross swords and defend himself to the last thrust.

His face assumed an expression of well-bred surprise. A look of perplexity clouded his eyes as he courteously observed in his blandest tones:

"I think, sir, you have made a mistake. My name is Sherburne."

"Sherburne!" repeated the other incredulously.

"Yes, John Sherburne." Drawing forth one of his business cards, he presented it to the man, who, after studying it a moment, lifted his glance and searched his companion's countenance again.

"And you are not Nate Judkins! I could have sworn you were."

"No. My card tells you who I am."

"And were you ever in England?"

John Sherburne's heart gave a startled leap. Should he admit or deny the fact? Then, as a sudden resolution took form in his mind, he replied, with an air of candor, not unmingled with pride:

"Oh, yes, several times. More than that, I am an Englishman by birth."

"Well, this beats me!" was the perplexed re-

joinder. "I was sure you were the man I've been looking for this many a year."

"Such mistakes often occur; but in this instance I must resemble your friend to a marked degree," said Mr. Sherburne, with an assumption of good humor that was still more misleading.

"You do and—you don't. You're stouter, and, of course, being older would change you. Your hair is white, and his was reddish brown when I last saw him; whik you have the air and look of a swell, which didn't belong to him at all. Still, all these changes might have come to you and yet you might be my old comrade——"

"Comrade!"

"Yes, we were soldiers in the same company in the old country."

"Really, this is growing exceedingly interesting," observed the broker, in a tone of well-assumed surprise, yet with a whitening of the lips beneath his mustache.

"And—and what may be your name, if you please?" He wondered if he could hear it and preserve his sorely tested aplomb.

"Dawson, sir; Joe Dawson."

"Dawson—Dawson? I don't think I ever knew any one by that name. So you were once an English soldier! That is a singular coincidence, for I served as captain in Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh more than thirty years ago."

"As *captain* in the Fifty-seventh!" repeated the man, with a sceptical smile. "I'll bet you are Nate

Judkins, after all," he added with sudden assurance and an ominous scowl; "and if I'm right then you are a——"

He leaned forward and breathed the last word in his companion's ear—a word which it took all John Sherburne's fortitude to hear without betraying himself.

But the next moment he remarked with an indulgent smile:

"Well, well, my friend, you seem bent upon changing my identity. What can I do to convince you that you have made a blunder? Ah!"—as if the thought had but just occurred to him—"perhaps if you could see the official discharge of Captain John Sherburne it might prove to you that I am not the man you seek."

A blank look settled upon the stranger's face at this.

"If you could show me that, I—suppose I'd have to give in," he reluctantly admitted.

"Then come home with me, Mr. Dawson, if you have the time to spare, and you shall be satisfied upon that point," said Mr. Sherburne, with persuasive candor. "This matter might as well be disposed of once for all, for that was an ugly name you hurled at me a moment ago, and it might be awkward if I should chance to meet you hereafter and still rest under the ban of your suspicion. I see an uptown car is coming, and we will take it."

He had spoken with a cheerful assurance which he was far from feeling, for there had rushed over

him a sickening sense of the ruin, the shame and ignominy that must have overtaken him if he had obeyed his recent impulse to destroy Captain John Sherburne's discharge paper, which, on the night of his introduction to Louis, he had feared might prove a witness against him, if it should ever come to light. Now he realized that upon it alone depended his salvation.

Upon arriving home, Mr. Sherburne conducted his guest directly to the library and hospitably ordered a bottle of wine and a box of cigars to be brought. Setting these before Mr. Dawson, he told him to help himself while he looked up the document. Dawson, with the eager gleam of one who loved his cups in his eyes, greedily availed himself of his opportunity, quaffing two full glasses before his host returned to his side and laid the important paper before him.

"There you are," Mr. Sherburne observed in an offhand tone. "That will prove to you that Captain John Sherburne was honorably discharged from Her Majesty's service on the 16th of October, 18—. Take your time to examine it."

"Humph!—'on account of disability,'" muttered Mr. Dawson, reading from the parchment. "You must have been pretty badly off to get this before your time was up."

"Yes, the surgeons said there was no hope; but for once they were mistaken, it seems, and England lost an officer in the early part of his career," explained Mr. Sherburne as he helped himself to a

cigar and lighted it.

"You didn't care to go back when you got well?" queried his companion.

"No, I'd had enough of it; so with that paper as my voucher I made a bee line for this country, to try my fortune here. Not very patriotic that—eh, comrade?"

"Well, hard service does put a man's patriotism to the test," Mr. Dawson admitted. "I suppose there is no disputing the evidence of this," he presently resumed as he laid the discharge upon the table and poured out another glass of wine for himself; "but I swear you look enough like Nate Judkins to deceive his own mother."

Mr. Sherburne deliberately blew a ring of smoke from his mouth.

"Perhaps you will run across your comrade some time and will not then find the resemblance so striking. At all events, you will not be liable to make the same mistake again," he quietly remarked.

Dawson made no direct reply, but his eyes studied the face opposite him with a look which was not wholly free from suspicion, in spite of the evidence before him.

"I'll be going now," he remarked after a moment of constrained silence, as he arose and set down his empty glass. "Much obliged to you for your hospitality, captain, and good luck to you."

Mr. Sherburne accompanied his guest to the door and wished him "good day," with his most affable manner.

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER thankfully speeding his departing guest, John Sherburne hurried back to his library, where, locking the door to protect himself against intruders, he sank upon a chair with a face like chalk.

"Joe Dawson! Joe, of all people in the world!" he gasped, after taking a moment to recover his breath. "Good Lord! After all these years! What if I had destroyed that discharge? I never could have allayed the man's suspicions. I'm not sure I have now, entirely; but, at least, he can prove nothing against me with that in my possession. I seem to be menaced from two different directions. What is to be the outcome?"

He sat in deep thought for ten or fifteen minutes, his face darkening and hardening with every passing moment.

"I'm not going to be beaten as near the end of the trip as this," he at last affirmed through his tightly compressed lips. "I've staked altogether too much on the game I have played, and—*what I have won I am going to keep!* But how make it secure beyond the possibility of loss?"

At this instant there came a tap on the door.

"It is I, Josephine, Uncle John," said that young lady, her clear, musical tones making a pleasant break in his uncomfortable reflections.

The man started, his face lighting suddenly with a gleam of triumph.

"That's the very thing. I'll do it," he muttered, as he arose and opened the door to admit his niece.

"Come in, come in, dear," he said, in an eager voice.

"Not if you are busy, Uncle John. I merely came to tell you there is an expressman asking for you. He wishes you to sign for a package," Josephine explained.

"All right. I'm not busy, so come in. I will be back directly, and I want to talk to you."

Miss Ashton nodded a smiling acquiescence as she entered and paced slowly up and down the long room, while she waited for her uncle to return.

She made a very pleasing picture in that rich room, with its luxurious furniture and hangings, its costly books, pictures, rugs, and bric-à-brac. She harmonized well with her surroundings, which seemed to belong naturally to her. In figure she was tall and symmetrical and well-poised; a trifle stately in carriage, deliberate, yet graceful in all her movements.

She had a fine face. It could not be called beautiful, although it was exceedingly attractive, and people seldom passed her without a second glance.

She had changed much in every way within the past four years. Her experience with Margaret Lawrence during their last year in high school had proved to be a turning point in her life and character. Then, too, misfortune and sorrow had aroused her to the fact that neither poverty nor wealth makes the

true man or woman, but the purity of purpose which inspires them; and this realization had done much to broaden, deepen and refine her, both mentally and morally. Thus, higher aspirations and resolves, together with the desire to be loved for herself, had combined to evolve a cultured and high-minded girl who could not fail to win the admiration and respect of all who knew her.

When Mr. Sherburne returned to the room she whirled around, with a gay smile on her lips, to meet him. But she saw at once that something had gone wrong with him.

"Is anything the matter, Uncle John?" she inquired, the smile quickly fading.

"Well, I have had a rather trying day in some respects," Mr. Sherburne replied. "But"—with a shrug of his broad shoulders, as if thus to rid himself of unpleasant memories—"we business men cannot escape our share of the worries of life. Come and sit down, Josie," he continued, slipping his hand beneath her elbow and leading her to a chair. "I have something important upon which I wish to consult you."

"Oh! Have you heard of a position for me?" the girl eagerly exclaimed.

"No and yes," he smilingly returned, as he seated himself opposite her. "Now listen, and don't ask me a single question until I have had my say."

"I won't if I can help it, only don't keep me in

suspense too long. You know a woman's curiosity is proverbial," Josephine roguishly retorted.

"I do not need to remind you, dear, that I am all alone in the world," her companion gravely resumed. "I do not know that I have a single relative living. It was always a bitter disappointment to both your aunt and me that we had no children of our own. As you know, we grew to love you almost as well as if you really belonged to us, and I once asked your father to give you to me. Of course he wouldn't listen to such an arrangement, though he was willing to spare you on long visits to us occasionally. Now you have been left alone; you have also been bereft of home and fortune, and, having been delicately reared, you are not fitted to cope with the world single-handed. In view of all this I am going to propose that you allow me to legally adopt you as my daughter."

"Uncle John!" cried Josephine, in almost breathless surprise.

"Wait until you hear all," he interposed. "I will not ask you to take my name, for, at your age, that would be awkward for both you and your friends. I only ask you to give me the privilege of feeling that you really belong to me, that I may have some one to care for and love during the remainder of my life—some one who will feel an interest in and perhaps something of affection for me. Cannot you understand, Josie, that I am a lonely old man, and yearn for some one in my home to bid me 'good-speed' when I go out and welcome me when I return? I

know you are proud-spirited and ambitious to do something for yourself; but cannot you accept this as your work—your mission—at least until some one younger and more attractive comes along to claim you and make you mistress of his home? You shall not be burdened in any way. Miss Wellington, who is a jewel in spite of her preaching, shall remain to manage the house as usual—that is, if such an arrangement would be agreeable to you.”

“I think Miss Wellington is lovely,” said Josephine, with kindling eyes. “And I *like* her ‘preaching,’ as you call it—there is something so practical and wholesome about it. But, Uncle John, I have always been an idler and pleasure-seeker—at least until I went to Vassar—and I have really wanted to see if it is in me to amount to something in the world through my own efforts. If I stay here, amid all this luxury, with you to pet and pamper me, I am afraid I shall drift back to the old aimless, selfish way of living, and—I don’t want to,” she concluded wistfully.

“Suppose your father had not lost his money, you would not—even with your desire for something better than pleasure and social position—have felt it necessary to go into active business or professional life, in order to prove that you could amount to something in the world,” argued Mr. Sherburne.

“No, I suppose not,” she said reflectively. “Yet I think I should have wished to have some worthy object in life.”

Exactly; and now you can have an opportunity

to choose what that shall be," said her companion; "for it was only a question of time," anyway, when you would have become a wealthy girl, Josephine. Ever since misfortune overtook you it has been my intention to leave you handsomely provided for; but, more recently, I have decided to make you my sole heir, and whether you accede to my proposition or not, you will eventually be mistress of all I possess, which is no small amount. I am not telling you this to place you under any obligation. It is not a bribe, my dear; it is simply that I must make some disposition of my property, and as you are nearer my heart than anyone else, I have settled the matter in this way. So, now, if you feel that you can remain and be a daughter to me—a bit of sunshine in the house—it will be a great comfort to me."

Josephine was deeply moved. This information, together with the proposition of adoption, had come as a great surprise to her. It would be delightful to feel that she was no longer alone in the world; that with a kind and genial guardian to love and protect her, and with plenty of money at her command, she need have no further anxiety about her future.

And yet, with the feeling of relief which such a prospect afforded here, there was a sense of disappointment in the thought of relinquishing her own plans to prove her mettle and ability to support herself.

If she refused to comply with her uncle's request it would really make no difference, except tempo-

rarily, perhaps, for he had settled the question as to how he would dispose of his fortune; it would be hers eventually, and it would almost seem like rank ingratitude not to try to make him some return, by ministering to his comfort and happiness during the remainder of his life.

Then, too, if she persisted in becoming a teacher, now that there no longer existed the necessity for supporting herself, would she not be wilfully robbing some poor girl of a much-needed position and its compensation?

She tried to look at the matter from every point of view. But at length she lifted a bright face and a pair of happy eyes to her companion.

"You have clipped my wings before I had a chance to try them, Uncle John," she smilingly observed; "and since I cannot fly away, as I had planned, it behooves me to settle gracefully down in my gilded cage and try to be the good and obedient daughter you wish."

"I hope you will not feel—caged, Josie," said the man in a doubtful tone.

"Oh, dear, no! That was only a figure of speech, Uncle John, for this beautiful home is so much better than any I ever expected to have again. It will be lovely to feel that it is really mine, and that you have taken me into your heart as well; and if, as you say, I can make your life brighter and happier I shall feel that I am doing some good in the world, and it will be a delightful arrangement as far as I am con-

cerned." She was so bright and animated as she concluded that Mr. Sherburne was reassured.

"And you will consent to be legally adopted?" he inquired, with repressed eagerness.

"Do you think such formalities necessary?" she asked.

Somehow this phase of the plan did not quite please her; it almost seemed like signing away her identity to enter into such a compact.

"It would make everything more secure for you, and would at once establish you in a definite social position here in Chicago," Mr. Sherburne returned. "Moreover, I am rather doubtful of wills and leaving other people to administer them. So, to fix the matter right and tight, I am going to settle my property upon you at once, reserving only the power of trustee for myself. In this way I can have the satisfaction of knowing that nobody can ever deprive you of your inheritance. Not even that fine young chap, who may come along some day to claim you, will be able to touch it without your consent," he concluded jocosely.

Josephine flushed consciously at this roguish fling, and then was nettled because she had done so; for it had caused her thoughts to turn to Louis Arnold, who only, she had long felt, would ever have any claim upon her heart. He alone was her ideal, her model, of what a man should be. Since coming to Chicago and meeting him again she realized that her admiration and regard for him were on the in-

crease, and she found herself yearning to awaken a responsive chord in his estimate of her.

But of course she had allowed nothing of this to become apparent to others, and she now strove to control her rising color at Mr. Sherburne's jest, and responded with ready compliance:

Very well, Uncle John, I know nothing about legal points, but you may do whatever you think best. I certainly am very grateful and happy in view of all your kindness to me, and now I am sure I shall never again feel so sad and lonely as I have felt during the last year."

She held out both hands to him, tears brimming her eyes as she concluded.

He arose and drew her to him, clasping her hands with one of his and laying his other arm lightly about her shoulders.

"I am more than happy," he said. "The world will seem much brighter to me if I can keep you with me, Josie. And now, dear, remember we are to be exactly like father and daughter in our future relations. If you want anything, you are to ask for it just as freely as if you had always belonged here: there is plenty of money, and the more you spend in making yourself and others—if you are inclined to charitable deeds—happy, the better I shall like it. Do you understand?"

The girl laughed to keep herself from weeping, for in this kind and generous mood he made her think of her own father, who had always been very tender with her.

"All right," she said, trying to speak lightly. "And to put you to the test I am going to begin right now."

"Good for you! What is it?"

"I want to invite a friend to spend the Christmas holidays with me and give her the best time of her life."

"You couldn't please me better. Fill the house with young people if you like, and be as gay as you choose," he heartily returned.

"No, I only want one for Christmas. She is my dearest friend, and I'm not going to share her with anybody else this time. There, see how selfishness crops out with the first temptation! I told you you would spoil me!"

And yet it was a happy little laugh that followed the words.

"I will risk it. But who is this dearest friend?" inquired the broker.

"Margaret Lawrence. We were classmates in high school, and I spent a week with her after I left Vassar."

"Then of course you owe her the visit. Send for her by all means, and right away, or she may make some other engagement," said Mr. Sherburne as eagerly as if it had been his own particular friend who was coming. "And now let us see," he added, seating himself at his desk and producing his check book, "I must not shirk any of my responsibilities. My adopted daughter must be supplied with her first month's allowance to seal the compact."

He filled in a slip for a generous amount and passed it over to her. She flushed sensitively as she glanced at it.

"I'm afraid you are too lavish, Uncle John," she began in a repressed tone.

"Tut—tut! You are not to criticise your sire's expenditures, and he won't question yours. Put it in your purse and later I'll arrange for you to have a check book of your own."

"Thank you, Uncle John," she said gratefully, his matter-of-fact tone and manner at once relieving her embarrassment. Then as her glance fell upon a paper lying spread out upon the table, she exclaimed curiously: "Oh, what is this, stamped with the English coat-of-arms? and on parchment, too! Why!" as her quick eye swept the sheet, "were you ever a soldier and a captain?"

John Sherburne frowned, and an icy chill went prickling through him. He seemed to be ill-fated of late, he thought, regarding this secret which he had preserved intact for so many years, and he felt irritated because he had not immediately returned the document to his safe after the departure of his recent guest. Now there would have to be more lying to explain the situation, and this consciousness sadly marred his satisfaction in the compact just concluded. But he quickly recovered himself.

"Yes, when I was a young man I served for a time in the English army, and that is my discharge. I was showing it to an old comrade this afternoon,"

he replied, as if it were a matter of no special interest.

He gently took the parchment from her and deposited it in his safe, glad to get it out of sight. He then began to talk of the prospective visit of Margaret Lawrence, and of various plans for her entertainment, and the discharge was for the time forgotten.

Very shortly after this the necessary steps were taken to legalize the adoption of Miss Josephine Ashton by Mr. John Sherburne, immediately following which the latter proceeded to settle the bulk of his property upon his new daughter.

When these important matters were adjusted the man experienced a sense of intense relief, and congratulated himself that he had accomplished the *coup de maître* which would insure them both a future of ease and luxury—let come what would.

Meantime a letter from Josephine went flying East to her friend Margaret Lawrence, telling her of the wonderful change in her prospects, and pleading for the holiday visit. Inclosed in the envelope with it there was a through ticket from Boston to Chicago, concerning which Josephine wrote:

“It is my Christmas gift to you, dear, so do not disappoint me, for I am longing for you with all my heart. I know the change will do you good, and you will go back to school feeling a hundred per cent. better prepared to finish out the year.”

Margaret responded with grateful acknowledgments and acceptance, and also wrote some news that was both a joy and a surprise to Josephine.

“Mother and Ted are going to Chicago to live, on or about the first of January. Ted has had a fine offer from a firm there, and after considering the pros and cons we have thought best to make our home there. I shall, of course, complete my year here at Smith, but, meantime, Ted is to be on the lookout for a position for me in or near Chicago, for we cannot be separated. Ted says his salary will be sufficient to support us all, and I need not work; but, having fitted myself for teaching, and having a real love for it, I am going to stick to it, at least for the present. However, we will talk more of my plans when I come to you. I shall leave Boston at nine, *via* B. & A. R. R., Friday evening, December 22d, and you will know where and at what hour to meet me Saturday night. Now, my dear, *au revoir*. Lovingly, MARGARET.”

CHAPTER XX

"MARGARET LAWRENCE coming here for a two weeks' visit!"

The speaker was Louis Arnold, who was making his usual weekly call upon Aunt Martha.

Miss Wellington had been telling him of Josephine's invitation to her friend, with something of the plans for her entertainment and the approaching holidays, and the quick flush that swept to his brows, the swift gleam of joy that leaped into his eyes, together with the tender thrill in his voice as he spoke the girl's name, at once revealed to his companion the sweet, long-cherished hope of his life which he believed was, as yet, safely locked within the most secret recesses of his heart.

"Yes, she will arrive a fortnight from to-night, and no doubt you will be glad to meet your class-mate while she is with us," demurely observed the lady, yet with a gleam of amusement in her eyes which told Louis that he had betrayed more than he had intended.

"I certainly shall," he said, "and, Aunt Martha," the flush deepening on his cheek as he suddenly felt impelled to confide in her—"I am sure you will like Miss Lawrence. I *hope* you will. I may as well tell you I think she is the finest girl I ever saw; just

the kind that would make an all-around companion for life," he slyly admitted, growing bolder as he progressed in his confidence. "I've told you something about her before—she is Gypsy, you know," he resumed, "and the girl who led our class in high. I was strongly tempted during my vacation a year ago last summer to sound her a little regarding her opinion of your humble servant, but I had no definite plans for my future in mind at that time, and I thought it would be hardly fair to make any advances until I had something besides my empty hands to offer with my heart."

"That was right," said Miss Wellington with an approving nod. "You certainly do try to govern your life by principle, dear boy. And Miss Lawrence has no suspicion of your regard for her?"

"I can't quite vouch for that," replied Louis, coloring again, as he recalled two or three occasions when his secret had very nearly escaped him. "But I have never spoken outright to her."

"Now, however," he resumed, "I feel that I am pretty sure what I am going to do. I like the lumber business; it is a good, clean, substantial business, even though there are some rough experiences connected with it. I like Mr. Buskirk; he is queer, but he is honest to the core, and we fit in together as if we had been made for each other; and the first of January he is going to double my wages."

"Double your pay! That is an unusual raise, isn't it?" queried Miss Wellington in surprise.

"Yes, it is; but I've tried to make myself useful."

I have been to the mills twice with him and have got a pretty thorough knowledge of how things are going there. I made a suggestion, too, that simplified the handling of some of the lumber and which pleased him greatly; and yesterday he told me what I might expect at the beginning of the year."

"I am very much pleased," said his friend appreciatively.

"So you see, Aunt Martha," Louis continued, "I feel that by the end of another twelve months I will be worth still more to him and get another raise; and perhaps it would not be too presumptuous of me to put my fate with Margaret to the test pretty soon. What do you think?"

Miss Wellington laid her hand affectionately upon the young man's shoulder.

"Thank you, my boy, for giving me your confidence," she said. "Regarding Miss Lawrence, I hear nothing but good of her from Josephine; and, as I am pretty sure I can safely trust your judgment in a matter which so vitally concerns your happiness, and your prospects seem favorable, I will simply quote an old proverb to you—'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

Louis threw back his head with a light-hearted laugh.

"How helpful you always are! I never go away empty when I come to you for counsel," he said, giving her a bright, fond look. "And this is such acceptable advice, too," he added contentedly.

"It almost seems as if we were back in New Hampshire and you were really 'my boy' again, to have you come to me with your plans, hopes and fears." And Miss Wellington affectionately stroked his arm as she used to do in the old days when they had their little confidential talk.

"I am always going to be your 'boy,' Aunt Martha, and you know that you are booked for your own special niche in my home, just as soon as that coveted place is established," he eagerly affirmed.

"That is very nice of you, Louis, but you know I never encouraged you in building castles in Spain, so I think we will wait awhile before we talk about that," smilingly responded his friend.

Again he laughed buoyantly.

"We will wait just one month, Aunt Martha," he retorted, with a sly smile, "for, acting upon the spirit of your proverb, I shall have learned something definite by that time. But"—and he grew suddenly grave—"if I fail to win Margaret I shall want a home just the same and I shall need you all the more."

"Aren't your forebodings a little premature, Louis, not to mention your plans to follow their fulfilment?" queried Miss Wellington with a roguish sparkle in her eyes that made him laugh again. "Now tell me," she went on abruptly, changing the subject, "have you ever looked over those old letters that belonged to your mother?"

"No; I sent for that box of things after we had that other talk about them; but, somehow, the right

time has never seemed to come to examine them—it strikes me that it isn't a very pleasant thing to do, to read letters written by people who are gone," Louis returned.

"But I think you ought; there may be something connected with the lives of your father and mother which might be to your interest to know," said Miss Wellington.

"Suppose you look them over for me, Aunt Martha," he pleaded. "If you find anything of importance you can save it out for me, though I am inclined to think they might as well be burned first as last."

"No, indeed; bring them to me and I will read them carefully for you. You would make a great mistake to burn them," prophetically objected Miss Wellington.

"All right, I will send them around in a day or two and you can take your own time," Louis responded as he arose to take his leave.

Two weeks slipped quickly by, and late on Saturday evening John Sherburne and Josephine drove to the station to meet their expected guest as previously arranged. They had to wait a little for the train and, arm in arm, paced the platform to pass the time.

They appeared to be very happy—as indeed they were in their new relationship—chatting and laughing in the most social manner and wholly unconscious that they were being stealthily followed by

a tall figure clad in a dark gray ulster and wearing a slouch hat drawn down over his eyes.

After walking to the end of the platform they turned and slowly retraced their steps, which necessitated their passing the man referred to. As they came close up with him he suddenly tipped back his hat, revealing a flushed and bloated face, and, slapping Mr. Sherburne familiarly on the shoulder, exclaimed in a thick, tipsy voice:

"How d'y, Nate Judkins? I'm blamed if I don't believe you're my man after all!"

John Sherburne felt a sudden contraction of his throat, as if a relentless hand had clutched him there, shutting off his breath for the moment. But he knew that everything depended upon his maintaining his self-possession. Let him make but a single false move and he was lost.

He turned with an air of mild surprise to the man and blandly observed:

"You have made a mistake, my friend; I don't know any such person. All the same, if there is anything I can do for you I shall be glad to oblige you."

The stranger searched the clean-shaven, aristocratic face for a moment, hesitated, changed the position of his hat, then meeting Josephine's wondering eyes drew back, muttering an incoherent apology, and slunk away.

"Why! what did he mean, Uncle John, by calling you by that name?" the girl inquired as they resumed their interrupted walk.

"I doubt if he knows himself what he meant,"

Mr. Sherburne replied in a tolerant tone. "He is a poor tipsy fellow, who evidently mistook me for some one else. There! I think the train is coming in, and just two minutes behind its time," he concluded as he wheeled his companion around and hurried her toward the approaching express, but hurling mental anathemas upon the fate that had caused that delay of two minutes and had plunged him into such an awkward predicament in the presence of his adopted daughter.

Another minute and Josephine and Margaret were in each other's arms, simultaneously voicing glad greetings and fond inquiries with characteristic girlish fervor and delight.

When these were over Josephine introduced her uncle, who cordially expressed his pleasure in having Miss Lawrence come to them. A few minutes later they were on their way uptown, where Miss Wellington had a dainty lunch ready to serve them.

Space will not permit a detailed account of the two weeks that followed. Something delightful had been planned for every day, while the evenings were devoted to grand opera and various other attractions, with now and then a pleasant little affair at home.

Two nights of every week Mr. Sherburne spent at his club, also Sunday afternoons, and upon those occasions Josephine tactfully arranged to include Louis in their party. True, Mr. Sherburne had never objected to the young man's visits to either Miss Wellington or his ward, yet it was evident to Josephine that he did not wish to meet Louis if he could avoid

doing so; hence the girl's desire to steer clear of awkward situations.

Miss Wellington was called upon to act as chaperon at such times, and was in her element, declaring she felt almost like a girl herself, and had never had such a good time in her life.

She not only enjoyed the companionship of the young people, but possessed the happy faculty of adapting herself to them, and with her keen, though quiet spirit of humor, she was excellent company.

She was the more glad to avail herself of these opportunities because she wished to study, from every point of view, the maiden upon whom her "boy" had staked his future happiness.

Margaret Lawrence had developed into a very beautiful girl. She was not brilliant or striking like Josephine; but one could not remain in her presence half an hour without becoming conscious of a cheeriness and sweetness of disposition, a purity of thought, and a conscientious regard for all that was good and true, which seemed to give promise of a harmonious and useful life wherever her lot might be cast.

Miss Wellington could find no fault with her, and, as it soon became evident that the attraction between Margaret and Louis was mutual, she felt sure that, when the right opportunity presented itself, the young man would not sue in vain for the love he coveted.

At the same time she was somewhat appalled to discover that Josephine was manifesting peculiar symptoms in view of similar convictions, even though

she spared no effort or expense to make her friend's visit as delightful as possible, and bravely strove to conceal the fierce struggle which was going on within her own heart, as she realized what the probable result of Margaret's visit would be.

On New Year's morning there came a package by express to each of the three ladies in Mr. Sherburne's household. They were all the same size, and upon examination were found to contain exquisite bunches of long-stemmed roses, each a duplicate of the other except in color. Miss Wellington's were pure white, Josephine's pink, and Margaret's a rich, glowing crimson; and to each was attached a card bearing the name of Louis Arnold, with the compliments of the season.

"How lovely of Mr. Arnold!" exclaimed Margaret, as she buried her glowing face among the vivid blossoms. In so doing she dislodged a tiny envelope which had been adroitly concealed in their midst, and which now fell fluttering to the floor in full view of her companions.

With conscious blushes suffusing her sweet face she stooped to recover it, while Miss Wellington, keenly observant of the situation, saw Josephine sharply catch her breath as her color suddenly faded, leaving her startlingly pale.

"Yes, Louis is always very thoughtful," Miss Wellington hastened to remark; "and see!" she added, to draw attention to herself and so cover Josephine's agitation. "He has been especially partial to me to-day." She held up a pocketbook having a gold

clasp, on which her initials were graven, as she concluded.

This little tactful ruse gave Josephine an opportunity to recover herself, and she immediately rose to the occasion.

"That is a beauty!" she said, going quickly to her side, as if eager to inspect the gift. "And you needed it, dear Miss Wellington," she added, with a faint smile.

"Yes, I know it. The last time I went out with Louis he said he was ashamed of my old one, and asked me to keep it out of sight." A little burst of happy laughter rippled over the woman's lips as she opened her treasure to investigate its numerous compartments.

"And he has sent you white roses, too; nothing else would have been quite the thing for you," murmured Margaret, as her eyes wandered from the snowy blooms to the pure, refined face above them. "And, Josie, your pink ones are superb," she concluded, stooping to inhale the fragrance of the offering to her friend.

"Yes—and I must put them in water," replied Josephine, as she turned abruptly away to get a vase, in which, after ringing for water to fill it, she arranged her flowers, and left it for a centerpiece on the large table in the drawing-room.

Margaret, however, carried her bouquet away to her own room, and that evening when she was dressed for the little New Year's reception which Josephine was giving in her honor, and which included the

Richardses and Westons, together with some acquaintances which she had recently made, she fastened one glowing, perfect blossom among the fluffy lace ruffles of her corsage.

"Love's answer to Love's offering," said Josephine to herself, with a sickening sense of loss which held her in thrall throughout the evening, making her duties as hostess well-nigh unbearable, particularly when her glance chanced to rest upon the lovers' happy faces.

No one suspected the truth save Miss Wellington, whose heart yearned to comfort the suffering girl, and even she did not dream of the battle which Josephine afterwards fought out alone in the silence and darkness of her own room, and which lasted until the gray dawn of morning began to creep into the eastern sky.

When the girl came resolutely face to face with the blighting fact that she and Margaret both loved Louis Arnold, and asked herself what was to be the outcome of the situation, she was appalled to find herself confronted by a couple of ugly dragons, bitter jealousy and vindictiveness, which she believed she had long since slain—dragons of that old school feud when Margaret had led her class and despoiled her of her coveted honors.

Could she bear it to have her rival rob her now of what she had fondly hoped would be the crowning glory of her life? If it had been anyone else, she thought it would not have seemed quite so hard.

Could they continue to be friends, or must they

become lifelong foes because of this? Should she allow resentment, hatred, and self-love to take possession of her once more and sweep out of existence the beautiful friendship of the last five years, thus marring the happiness of Margaret, who was guiltless of wrong toward her, and casting an even deeper blight upon her own future? What would she gain by such a course? Would it bring Louis nearer to her—would it even help her in any way to bear this sorrow and disappointment which had overtaken her so unawares?

These were some of the searching questions which confronted her in the darkness and silence of that first night of the New Year, and there finally came to her the realization that there could be but one conclusion of the whole matter. She had once risen superior to such unworthy traits, and she could never sink to their level again. Such a retrograde step could only result in a sense of the loss of something very dear and sweet out of her life, in losing Margaret; in a feeling of scorn from the man whom she loved, together with endless humiliation and contempt for herself and—*she must conquer self again*. With this she fell asleep, and did not waken until Miss Wellington tapped upon her door and inquired if she had overslept and missed hearing the breakfast-bell.

The next *few days* loomed up like ages before her, for it seemed as if she could not perform the duties devolving upon her, wear a brave front and make no sign. Margaret was not to leave until

Friday morning, and Josephine lived in constant dread of a confidential disclosure from her.

Tuesday and Wednesday were pretty well filled with engagements and passed quickly. Thursday morning there was a round of shopping, and Mrs. Richards had claimed them for the afternoon and evening.

This little visit was like a benediction after the excitement of the past two weeks. It was like the reunion of a loving family whose aims and hopes were one; who were at peace with each other and all mankind; whose restful happiness and freedom from all anxious thought were founded upon something higher than the pleasures and prosperity of this world. Even Josephine was soothed by the harmonious atmosphere surrounding her and sighed regretfully when the hour for leave-taking arrived.

Louis accompanied the ladies home, where, leaving his coat and hat in the hall, he followed Margaret into the drawing-room with an air of quiet assurance which told its own story.

Miss Wellington, as if blissly unconscious of anything unusual in the procedure, mounted the stairs to the second floor. Josephine, also taking the hint, slipped up after her, and, with a brief "good-night," disappeared within her own room.

An hour later she heard the hall door close, and presently there came a gentle tap on her own. She had been nerving herself for this last confidential talk with Margaret, and was outwardly calm as she admitted her friend, and smiled archly into

the sweet face that was covered with conscious blushes.

"I know what you have come to tell me, dear," Josephine observed, thus forestalling the prospective confession. "I have been expecting to hear it every day for a week."

"Why, Josie, have you, really?" exclaimed Margaret. "What made you suspect? I——"

"One didn't need to consult an oracle in order to receive confirmation of what was patent to everybody from the outset," playfully responded Josephine as Margaret paused from embarrassment.

"Well, of course, I couldn't tell anyone here until I had written mamma and Ted to find out what they thought about it," Margaret explained apologetically. "You see," she resumed, "Louis and I have been fond of each other for years, but nothing definite has ever been said until I came here. When he called New Year's afternoon—you were practising those duets with Mr. Welton—he told me, but I could give him no promise until I heard from home. This morning I had my letter. Mamma and Ted are both delighted, and so——"

"So Louis came in to-night to get his final answer," supplemented Josephine, as her companion again found it difficult to proceed.

For reply Margaret held out her left hand, on which there shone a small but clear white stone, very prettily set.

"Well, it seems he was serenely confident of results, and came prepared to take immediate posses-

sion of his prize," returned Josephine, forcing a light laugh to her lips.

"Yes, I suppose we both felt that writing to mamma was only a matter of form, for she has known and admired Louis for a long while; but of course we owed her the courtesy of asking her sanction; and now I am telling you first of all." And Margaret caught her friend to her in a loving embrace.

The die was cast, and Josephine, having herself well in hand by this time, was able to listen while the unsuspecting girl told her something of her recent interview with Louis and his plans for their future.

They would have to wait a couple of years before they could make a home for themselves, she said; until Louis was more thoroughly established in business. Meantime she would continue to teach, and she hoped she would be able to secure a position there in Chicago.

It was fully midnight before Margaret realized that she had a long journey before her on the morrow, and was also keeping her friend from her rest.

She bade Josephine a loving "good-night," and went to her own room to dream of her present happiness and the joys awaiting her; while Josephine spent another night in mortal combat with the giant—Self.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next morning Margaret bade an affectionate farewell to her friends, expressing her appreciation of all they had done to make her visit enjoyable, and turned her face once more toward Boston, where-upon life in John Sherburne's home settled back into its usual routine.

But a great change in Josephine soon became apparent. Now that the necessity for dissembling was past the reaction came, and she seemed to have neither courage nor strength to resist it.

She had believed that she had fought her battle to the end, on New Year's night, upon discovering that Louis and Margaret had come to a definite understanding; but day after day the struggle was renewed until she almost despaired of ever rising above it.

"Did I ever really conquer self?" she sighed. "Was that experience of the old school days an actual victory or did I only superficially embrace an ideal that attracted me for the time? Were the jealousy and selfishness of my nature really overcome, or were they simply covered up, glossed over for a while, only to break forth with more malignant force upon another seeming provocation? Did I ever really love Margaret? Have I ever been a

true friend to her—true enough to be willing to trample self under foot for her sake, to renounce all I hold most dear to make her happy? Can I do this now, so completely, so utterly that no sting of bitterness will be left to rankle and my love be just as spontaneous as it has seemed during the last five years? It must be that or nothing; for, as Miss Wellington says, ‘anything short of absolute right is absolute wrong.’ Am I equal to it? Oh, I do not know, I cannot tell—yet.”

Thus the conflict raged within Josephine’s wounded heart, while she grew strangely morbid and indifferent to all that was going on around her. Both Mr. Sherburne and Miss Wellington began to be quite exercised in view of her condition. Miss Wellington thought she understood what was the trouble; but she felt that it was too delicate a matter to be meddled with unless the girl voluntarily gave her confidence and sought her counsel and sympathy. She was, however, very tender and thoughtful toward Josephine and shielded her in every possible way when her uncle became too inquisitive and solicitous.

Mr. Sherburne proposed a trip to Southern California and Mexico, hoping that change of air and scene would be beneficial. But Josephine said she did not care to travel; she preferred the comforts and quiet of home. She well knew that, go where she would, she could never get away from the question at issue—*the question whether she would conquer or be conquered.*

One dismal, stormy day, feeling more than usually depressed and intolerant of her troublesome thoughts, Josephine took her work-basket and went across the hall to Miss Wellington's room, with the hope of forgetting herself for awhile in the society of another.

"Come in, dear," said a gentle voice from within—a voice which always seemed to carry with it a "peace be unto you."

Entering, Josephine found the woman seated in the wide, sunny bay window engaged in looking over a box of old letters.

"You are busy," she said and pausing upon the threshold as she saw the nature of Miss Wellington's occupation.

"No, dear, I am nearly through; so come right in," cordially responded Miss Wellington, adding: "These are some letters that belonged to Louis' mother and which he never felt any desire to examine. He wanted to burn them, but I thought they ought to be looked over first and he begged me to do it for him. I haven't found anything of special interest yet excepting perhaps some correspondence which, I judge, may have passed between his grandfather and grandmother on his mother's side, as they both refer to 'our daughter Annie.' The letters were written in England many years ago. There are also some others from his father, evidently penned to his mother before their marriage."

"Then Louis' mother was an English lady?" Jo-

sephine observed in a tone of interest, as she drew up a rocker beside her companion.

"Yes, she was born in England, but came to this country when quite young."

"What was her maiden name?" the girl inquired, more for the sake of saying something than because she really cared to know.

"Annie Judkins," replied Miss Wellington as she took another letter from its envelope and unfolded it.

Josephine felt as if she had received an electric shock as the name fell upon her ears, and instantly the incident which had occurred in the station while she and Mr. Sherburne had been waiting to meet Margaret flashed through her mind.

"Judkins!" she repeated musingly; "I wonder if she could have been related to a man named Nate or Nathan Judkins."

Miss Wellington looked up in surprise from the sheet she was perusing.

"I am sure I don't know. No such name appears in any of these letters," she said. "These, which I surmise were written by her father to her mother, bear no surname; they are simply signed 'John.' Here is one now," she continued as she glanced at the signature of another epistle she had just opened, "and the man wrote a very round, clear hand."

Then Miss Wellington herself experienced a sudden shock as it dawned upon her that the chirography of that name "John" was very similar to,

if not identical with, the one written on the back of the photograph of the English soldier which she had reclaimed from the rubbish that Mr. Sherburne had ordered to be thrown away after the cleaning of the library. But she made no comment; she simply said to herself, "I'll ask Louis to compare them," and she was so absorbed in this new phase of the old mystery that she forgot her surprise at Josephine's question about the name of Nate or Nathan Judkins.

"Here is a curious old relic," she presently observed, as she lifted from the box a worn and faded but richly embossed leather case, about eight inches long by five wide, and held it up before Josephine. "It must have been a very handsome thing in its day and quite expensive. It has an inter-lining of oil silk between the leather and the green satin, and I think it must have been made for some one going on a sea-voyage, to keep letter-paper, envelopes, stamps, etc., from becoming damp. See! the various compartments look as if intended for writing materials."

Josephine took the case from her and examined it with some manifestation of interest. But even though it had evidently been a rich and costly thing in its day, it seemed to her to be utterly worthless now, and she presently laid it aside and resumed her work, chatting with her companion, who was tying her carefully assorted letters into packages, preparatory to putting them away.

In the midst of this a maid appeared, who came

to say the cook would like to see the housekeeper below on some matter pertaining to dinner.

"I won't be long, Josephine, so stay where you are till I come back," Miss Wellington observed, as she arose to leave the room.

Josephine took a few stitches after she was left alone, then her hands dropped listlessly upon her lap, and she fell to thinking over what Miss Wellington had told her regarding Louis' mother.

"So she was an English woman, and her name was Annie Judkins," she mused. "How queer! I wonder if there can be the remotest connection between her and the man, Nate Judkins, of whom that tipsy stranger spoke that night."

As she sat thinking of this her glance fell again upon the old leather case, when she caught sight of something that looked like a monogram on the back of it.

Reaching for it she began to study it. It was almost obliterated in places, but, carefully tracing it with her needle, she finally made out the letters: "J. S."

"Those are Uncle John's initials! What a strange coincidence!" she exclaimed. "And—Miss Wellington said those letters were signed 'John.' It is rather a singular mix-up of names and identities. That man addressed Uncle John as Nate Judkins. Louis' mother's name was Annie Judkins, and his grandfather's was John!"

As she was peeping into the various compartments of the case, in an aimless kind of way, she thought

she detected a slight crackle as if there were a piece of stiff paper between the lining and the leather. Examining it more closely she found that a slit had been cut in the oil-silk interlining. She inserted her fingers in the aperture and brought to light a folded paper yellow with age, but otherwise looking as if it had never before been disturbed in its hiding-place.

Without pausing to consider that she might be prying into something she had no right to know, she opened it, and the first line her eyes fell upon caused a cry of amazement to burst from her.

It was the record of a marriage. Beneath this a birth was recorded, and on the next line, beside a date ten years later, the entry of a death.

Then there followed some closely written pages which Josephine's eager eyes devoured with almost lightning-like rapidity.

By the time she reached the end her face was absolutely colorless, and wore a look of unspeakable horror.

"What can it mean?" she panted. Then, throwing out one hand with a repelling gesture—"I see—I see! Everything is explained! Oh, why should *I* have been the one to discover it?"

She was greatly excited, and hastily refolding the paper was about to slip it back into its place of concealment, when an unaccountable impulse caused her to seize a pencil from her work-basket and a piece of blank paper and copy the names and dates of that marriage, birth and death.

The brief story related beneath she had no need

to copy; she would never be able to forget it if she lived a hundred years!

The copy made, she carefully replaced the paper where she had found it, pressing the oil-silk interlining down hard upon it and smoothing the satin over that. Then she put the case back with the letters, but feeling strangely like a thief as she did so.

When Miss Wellington returned Josephine was busily engaged with her fancy-work, and forced herself to be cheerful and social, even though her mind was in a whirl until the lunch-bell rang.

As soon as the meal was over Josephine went directly to her own room and locked herself in. Then, all her forced strength forsaking her, she sank in a heap upon the floor, dropping her face upon her knees. She was miserable and wildly rebellious in view of the secret which had been revealed to her that morning. Why—*why* had it fallen to her lot to discover it? Why had she been possessed to pry into the secret recesses of that old leather case? Oh, if she had only let it alone—if she had not touched it the second time! It was cruel, it was horrible; and now there was no escape from its menace.

She, the adopted daughter and heiress of John Sherburne, alone held in her keeping the fate of four people: Louis, Margaret, her uncle John, and—herself. Had she not already had enough to bear without having this fearful responsibility, with its crushing shame and sacrifice, also laid upon her?

Could she ever meet what seemed to lie before her? Did she possess sufficient regard for truth and honor

to go boldly to the friend to whom she owed so much, tell him that she had unearthed the secret of his life, and take her stand for the right, in the face of all that he had done for her?

Then came the temptation to let it alone, and possibly some one else—Louis or Miss Wellington—might yet find what she had found; then let Louis face John Sherburne with it—it was his affair more than hers—and demand restitution. She would thus escape acting the part of the viper which stung the bosom that warmed it. That, to her, seemed the cruelest feature of the whole matter.

In the midst of these arguments came the appalling thought that it was beyond the power of John Sherburne to right this wrong, for had he not already endowed her with all that he possessed? And, like a blow in the face, there swiftly followed the conviction that he had done this very thing to secure his ill-gotten wealth, and so, by making her his beneficiary, had shifted all responsibility from his shoulders to hers.

Her blood boiled with indignation as she realized that she had been made accessory—even though unconsciously—to such a plot. She saw that, as matters now stood, she could retain possession of this fortune, and no one could wrest it from her, and the future of both would be luxuriously provided for.

“Did he imagine that I would lend myself to such a scheme?” she panted, springing to her feet and pacing the floor excitedly. “He might never have been detected but for what I found this

morning; yet even if some one else had discovered it, could he believe that I would keep what I had no moral right to have? Oh, Uncle John—Uncle John! it was unworthy of you. It was unfair to me; and I loved you so; I love you now, in spite of all, for you have always been good to me.”

“Now what am I going to do?” she moaned. “Of course I know what is the right thing to do, and if I do it Louis and Margaret need not wait two long years for their home. Margaret once sacrificed herself for a foe; do I now possess sufficient principle and fortitude to deal justly and keep my friend, preserve my honor, my self-respect, my peace of mind?”

Just then her glance fell upon a silken scarf that hung over the foot-rail of her bed. It was one that Margaret had forgotten when she went home, and Josephine had intended to send it to her that very day by mail. She caught it up with a pathetic little cry, and, burying her face in its soft folds, fell to weeping in utter abandonment.

With this rain of tears there was poured forth all the bitterness that had so rankled in her heart during the last few weeks, while a flood of love and peace, together with a buoyant sense of supremacy over all that had seemed to crush her to earth, flowed in, like balm and oil, to soothe and heal. It was the “Peace, be still” after the storm and tempest, and at length, with a restful little sigh, she lifted her head and wiped her tear-laden cheeks.

But a look of dismay overspread her face as she

saw the soaked and discolored scarf in her hands.

"Margaret's scarf is ruined!" she said. Then a smile chased the clouds away as she added: "But it is baptized with love, and I shall keep it as long as I live."

A couple of days later Mr. Sherburne returned from his office in high spirits, and, while the family were at dinner, burst forth with almost boyish eagerness:

"How would you like a trip to Europe, Josie?"

"That has been a delectable prospect which I have nursed for a good many years," Josephine replied, repressing a sigh. "You know papa promised to give me a year of travel abroad as soon as I finished my college course."

"Well, you shall have it now, my girl," said her uncle cheerily. "I've about made up my mind to rest on my oars for awhile. Business has been booming of late, and there is another fat plum about ready to drop into your basket, Miss Ashton; so it has occurred to me that we may as well have a real good time for the next two or three years."

Miss Wellington found herself wondering if the "fat plum" had ripened upon the bogus mine which had been the rock upon which Mr. Sherburne and Louis had split; and Josephine was also cringing under a similar thought. But the gentleman was so engrossed with his subject, he went on talking of his plans, mentioning various places he wished to visit, and questioning Josephine regarding her prefer-

ences. Consequently he did not appear to observe her lack of enthusiasm regarding the proposed trip.

When dinner was over he asked her to come to the library and examine some itineraries which he had brought home to discuss with her.

Josephine followed him with a quaking heart, for she realized that the time had come for her to tell her uncle the secret she had discovered. She listened quietly while he read aloud an attractive prospectus; and when he finally laid it aside she inquired, by way of opening the subject so near her heart:

"What will be the expense of such a trip, Uncle John?"

The man turned to her with a good-natured laugh.

"Miss Ashton, you do not need to care what the expense will be," he said. "You have money enough and to spare."

"But I have never felt as if it really belonged to me," Josephine replied with rising color. "I—I suppose there is a great deal."

"Well, I don't imagine we would rank with so-called money kings; but I've always been pretty lucky in business, and am more than satisfied with the results."

"But you had a fine windfall to begin with, hadn't you? I once heard Aunt Madeline tell mamma that you inherited quite a fortune."

John Sherburne frowned with annoyance.

"Well, yes; there were some twenty thousand

pounds that came to me from—from a relative,” he reluctantly admitted.

“That is about a hundred thousand dollars, I believe,” thoughtfully observed the girl, with quickening heart-throbs.

“Ye—es; but what are you driving at, Josie?” queried her guardian, bending a curious look upon her.

Josephine moved her chair closer to his side, and lifted a pale, grave face to him.

“Uncle John,” she began tremulously, “I had an object in asking you these questions; and now will you be very kind and patient while I tell you a little story that I have recently learned?”

Without waiting for a reply she went on rapidly:

“Away back in 18— the eldest son of John Sherburne, Senior, an ironmonger of England, married against his father’s wishes. He was disinherited, and all the ironmonger’s property was willed to the younger son, James John Sherburne, Junior, afterward enlisted as a soldier in Her Majesty’s Fifty-seventh Regiment, where, in time, he became a captain. Later he was discharged because of illness and disability. After lingering some time he died. The evening previous to his burial a deserter—wait, Uncle John”—as the man, who until that moment had sat as if frozen, gave a violent start—“a deserter named Nathan Judkins sought refuge with Mrs. Sherburne. Upon learning of her affliction, and that she and her child were reduced to absolute want, without even the

necessary money for funeral expenses, Nathan Judkins offered to buy her husband's discharge papers and pay her a large sum for them, provided she would assume the name of Judkins, he taking that of John Sherburne. Thus protected, he would be able to evade the officers who were on his track, and so make good his escape. Half-crazed with grief and her financial troubles, the widow consented. She never fully realized what a grave mistake she had made until, a few years after coming to this country, she read an advertisement for the nearest of kin to James Wilton Sherburne, —shire, England, and knew that she had sold the birthright of her only child."

"Good Heavens, Josephine, what do you mean? Who told you this story? Are you crazy?" John Sherburne leaned forward and laid an almost savage grip upon her arm. There was a wild light in his eyes that made her shrink involuntarily from him.

"No, Uncle John, I am not crazy; though during the last few days I have been almost crushed by the burden of this secret. I learned the story from a written statement left by the widow of the real John Sherburne, who was a captain in Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh."

"Where did you get that statement?" demanded her uncle sharply.

"I found it. It is a secret which I alone possess as yet, although it is liable to be discovered by others at any time. Here is a record of John Sherburne's

family, which I copied from the statement." Drawing a slip of paper from the folds of her corsage, she laid it in his hand.

The man was greatly excited, and trembled visibly as he grasped the paper and held it up to the light to read; but he breathed easier after taking in with one quick glance that brief record of marriage, birth, and death.

"Humph! this doesn't amount to very much," he observed. "Where is the story that goes with it?"

"I did not have time to copy that," Josephine replied. "I only read it very hurriedly. I suppose I had no right to do that; but those names so startled me that I devoured what followed almost before I knew what I was about. You say this record does not amount to very much; but it amounts to a great deal, in my opinion. John Sherburne married Mary Harworth in 18—. They had one child, Annie Sherburne, who was ten years old when her father died. She afterwards became the wife of Albert Arnold; and Louis Arnold is the grandson of Captain John Sherburne and—the nearest of kin to James Wilton Sherburne; so——"

"Well?" came impatiently from between the man's tightly shut teeth as she paused.

"You remember how, the night we went to the station to meet Margaret, a man accosted you by the name of Nate Judkins——"

"Well?"

"And"—Josephine was very pale; she was find-

ing her self-imposed task very trying—"I had seen Captain John Sherburne's discharge. You had told me it was yours——"

"And it is mine," interposed her companion, with colorless lips, but with a hunted look in his eyes.

"So,"—Josephine forced herself to finish what she had to say—"after reading Mrs. Sherburne's statement, it came to me that you were the man who had bought her husband's discharge and——"

Her voice failed her utterly at this point, and she dropped her head wearily upon her hand.

"And you believe that *I* am that deserter—Nathan Judkins! that *I* bought John Sherburne's discharge of his widow, and afterwards passed myself off as nearest of kin to James Wilton Sherburne, and appropriated his fortune! A fine character you have made out your uncle to be, Miss Ashton!" The man's tone was exceeding bitter as he concluded, and his face was distorted with mingled pain and anger.

"Oh, Uncle John!" breathed the girl almost inaudibly, as she laid an appealing hand upon his arm.

He did not appear to hear her. He sat straight and rigid in his chair, thinking, with every faculty of his mind alert; going over every step of his career and, while conscious that he was finally unmasked, at least to Josephine, trying to find some loop-hole of escape from the terrible tangle.

The bitterest drop in his poisoned cup, however, was the fact that this girl—the only being in the world whom he loved and who possessed any affec-

tion for him—had been the one to unearth his secret. It was with a feeling akin to despair he realized that his life would be a blank without her.

If, now that he stood revealed to her as the crafty schemer and impostor which all his life he had been, she should repudiate him, he knew that all the wealth of the world would not make up to him for such a loss.

Her pallor and evident suffering also hurt him deeply. Were they caused by her disappointment in him, or by the prospect of losing the fortune which he had settled upon her?

"You have not yet told me, Josephine, where you found this story," he at length remarked, after having forced himself to a semblance of calmness.

"In an old leather case which had been put away with some letters belonging to Louis Arnold's mother," she told him, and then related in detail just how the discovery had been made.

"Do you suppose Miss Wellington still has that case here?" he inquired when she concluded.

"I cannot say, Uncle John; she may have returned it to Louis," Josephine responded, as she flashed a searching glance into his face. "I am quite sure, though, that she has not discovered what I know, for I was very careful to put the paper back just where I found it, and I—I pressed the oil-silk down close over it. My first impulse was to conceal what I had learned from everyone, for your sake and for my own, too, for like a flash it rushed in upon my mind what such a discovery would mean to us both."

She paused a moment, then lifted her eyes to his, a clear and steady light shining in them.

"That shows you, Uncle John," she resumed, "that I am not above being tempted. There has always been a great deal that was arrogant, selfish, and mean in my make-up, and I am going to tell you something of a terrible experience I once had because I allowed myself to be governed by those propensities."

"Don't tell me anything that will pain you to recall," Mr. Sherburne interposed.

"Yes, I am going to, for I think it may help us both to do right now," Josephine returned. "Margaret Lawrence and I, as you know, were classmates in high school at home, during our senior year. I had led the class until she came. Then she went to the front and I became so wildly jealous of her I determined I would ruin her record and get the lead again. We were forbidden to use a mathematical key—she was specially brilliant in mathematics—and I hid one that belonged to Rob in her desk. It was found there by the principal, and Margaret was publicly reprimanded. But there was something found in the book which betrayed my agency, though I wouldn't admit it even then. Margaret, however, insisted that my name should not be known in connection with the discovery, saying she would rather never be set right than have me publicly disgraced—only the principal and one other knew anything about it. But Mr. Allyn declared that Margaret must be exonerated before the class. Of course I

knew I ought to confess the whole thing; but I was obstinate and seemed to hate Margaret all the more because of her goodness in shielding me. A few months later she saved me from a bad accident and my ponies from being killed—but you know all about that—and that broke my wicked spirit. I confessed everything to her, and told the whole class about the key——”

“Great Scott, Josephine, that was pluck!” Mr. Sherburne here exclaimed, in a burst of admiration.

“Pluck?” she repeated scornfully. “It was but tardy justice, and I never knew a peaceful moment until I did it. I could never forget it—it was like a poisoned thorn fastened and corroding in my flesh. But Margaret was so dear about it; and, after that, we grew to love each other, and have been the closest friends ever since, until—until she came here for her visit.”

“Until she came here? Why, Josephine?” said her companion in great surprise.

“Yes—and oh, Uncle John, this is worse than the other,” returned Josephine, hiding her scarlet face against his shoulder.

“Then don’t tell it, my girl,” he said, as he softly stroked the brown head with an unsteady hand.

“Yes; I must finish,” she asserted, as she sat erect again and resolutely resumed: “Before she came—yes, even before I left high school—I was fond of—Louis.”

“Josie!”

"Wait, please," she pleaded, with a catch in her breath.

"After he came to Chicago the feeling grew and grew; but when Margaret came I saw, almost from the first, that they had chosen each other. Then I had all that old hate and jealousy, which I thought had been rooted out of my nature so long ago, to battle with again. I cannot tell you what a dreadful time I had, nor how I ever got through that last week of her visit."

"Ah! now I understand," interposed Mr. Sherburne, as he recalled the reaction that followed Margaret's departure.

"The last night Margaret was here," Josephine went on, without seeming to heed the interruption, "she told me of her engagement and showed me her ring, and I have been like two individuals in mortal combat with each other ever since. Then, to cap the climax, came this revelation that—that——" She paused and lifted an appealing look to the man beside her.

"Go on!" he commanded, with paling lips.

"This revelation that Louis Arnold's grandfather—not you—was Captain John Sherburne, of Her Majesty's Fifty-seventh, and the rightful heir to the fortune left by his brother, James Wilton Sherburne, and which now legally belongs to Louis Arnold, together with a proper rate of interest for the years he has been deprived of it."

CHAPTER XXII

JOSEPHINE paused again, but John Sherburne made no comment, although the expression on his face told of strongly conflicting emotions within; and she resumed:

“It took my breath away when I first grasped the truth. I saw that Louis would marry Margaret very soon—with this fortune they would not need to wait two long years, as they had planned—while you and I perhaps might be reduced to poverty. Why should Margaret always come between me and my fondest hopes? I asked myself with jealous bitterness. First she won class honors from me; then she won Louis, and with him will share the fortune which I had begun to look upon as mine. It wasn’t fair, I said, and then—I hid that paper again in the case. You can see, Uncle John, how the evil in me cropped up anew, and I found myself upon the verge of an abyss which, as I gazed into it, made me shrink back appalled. Oh, I cannot live it over again; but I struggled until I could battle no longer, then something within me let go—I am sure it was my selfish will—and everything seemed to whirl and slip away from me for a little. The letting-go saved me. I knew then that nothing could tempt me to lend myself to the perpetuation



“I will not do it,” he cried, excitedly.



of this wrong. I knew that self was really conquered and I need not lose my friend, my capacity to love, my honor, my self-respect. Then I saw I must come to you, tell you what I had learned, also of my resolve to do what is right and beg you to deal justly also."

After she ceased speaking there followed a long silence, during which John Sherburne sat with bowed head and averted face; and who shall tell of the struggle that was raging within his long case-hardened heart? All the pride, greed and combativeness of his nature arose in hot rebellion against having the splendid fortune, which he had spent the best part of his life in amassing, wrested from him just as he was contemplating retiring from active business, and anticipating solid enjoyment for the remainder of his life. Great Heavens! the mere thought of restoring to the rightful heir those twenty thousand pounds, with even the minimum rate of interest added for all the intervening years, made every individual hair stand on end and every separate pore reek moisture.

It would more than bankrupt him; and how could he ever hope to retrieve himself, at his time of life, and make suitable provision for Josephine's future? He loved the girl with all his heart, and could not endure the thought of having her battle with the world. He had legally adopted her and settled his property upon her for the sole purpose of averting this very exigency; and now, strangely enough, she herself had seemed to have been made

the channel through which justice had overtaken him.

Josephine covertly watched him while he sat silently revolving the situation in his mind. She had been calmed and strengthened by the telling of her story and the stand she had taken for the right, and she was now simply waiting for him to recover from the first shock of surprise before consulting with him regarding the best and easiest way to arrange a settlement with Louis. Consequently she was greatly startled when, without lifting his head, he observed:

"It can never be proved against me, Josephine."

"Uncle John!" she exclaimed in a shocked tone, "it has already been proven."

"Yes, to you, perhaps," he replied in a hard voice; "but even if Arnold should find that statement, he could not prove that *I* am the man who bought his grandfather's discharge and appropriated his fortune. There may be many men in the world who call themselves John Sherburne; and only one person living, besides yourself, has ever seen that paper. No; that old record alone would not be sufficient evidence to make out a case against me, and certainly I would be a fool to go to Louis and voluntarily confess such a transaction. No, I will not do it," he cried excitedly, as he started to his feet and began to walk the floor like some wild animal in its cage, his face crimson, the veins on his forehead and in his neck standing out like cords. His eyes burned like coals of fire, his teeth were

locked, and his lips compressed in a line of relentless defiance.

Josephine regarded him with fear and trembling. She had never dreamed that he could lose himself in such a passion as this. Finally she arose, and, approaching him, was about to address him, when he repelled her with a violent gesture.

"Don't speak to me!" he said fiercely. "Go! go! I want to be alone!"

The girl stole softly away, almost crushed by her failure to win him to deal justly, but still steadfast in her own determination to do right.

"I will never share a home or money that has not been honorably obtained," she said with quiet resolution upon reaching her room; and with that ultimatum she patiently bided her time.

Then there followed several days that were indescribably dismal. Miss Wellington was not sure whether Mr. Sherburne was struggling with illness or absorbed in some business complication that had suddenly arisen to annoy him.

Josephine, though secretly miserable, kept her own counsel, and calmly waited for him to recover somewhat from this first shock before making one more appeal. If she failed again, she knew she must take her final stand, confess the discovery of that paper to Miss Wellington, and let matters take their course; then go out into the world alone to face her future.

A week from the Sunday following Josephine's exciting interview with her uncle, late in the after-

noon, while she was writing some letters, a maid came to her saying that Mr. Sherburne would like to see her in the library.

With a quaking heart she laid aside her pen and arose to comply with his request, wondering within herself what would be the result of the interview.

She found Mr. Sherburne lying back in his study-chair looking haggard and weary; but he smiled faintly as she entered the room, and held out his hand to her with something of his old cordiality.

"Have I made you very wretched during the last ten days, Josephine?" he inquired as he observed that she was deeply moved.

"I haven't been very happy, Uncle John," she truthfully returned.

"Happy? Well, I've been in—*hell!*" he hoarsely rejoined with exceeding bitterness.

Then suddenly pulling himself together, he reached for a chair near him, saying:

"But sit down. I want to talk more about—that affair. I've come to the conclusion that something has got to be done. Do you think we could—compromise the matter?"

"Compromise?" repeated Josephine inquiringly.

"Yes. Suppose I were to make over a sum of money to Arnold, say fifty thousand dollars, without letting him know where it came from—would that satisfy your conscience?"

"Would you regard that as proper restitution?" Josephine inquired.

“ Well, it would be quite a windfall for a young man like Louis,” said the man, shifting uneasily in his chair. “ Who knows but that, if James Sherburne’s fortune had fallen to the boy’s father and mother, it might have been squandered long ago?”

Josephine regarded her guardian with sad, heavy eyes. She was bitterly disappointed and sick at heart.

“ I do not see how there can be any compromise,” she said, after thinking a moment. “ It seems to me that nothing but *full restitution* is to be considered.”

“ But that would mean a clean breast of everything.”

“ Yes, but—oh, Uncle John, let us do right and be happy!” Josephine pleaded, as two great tears rolled over her cheeks and splashed upon her hands.

The man groaned aloud. Her tears hurt him sorely.

“ But, Josephine, can’t you see what would follow for me?—arrest for crime and desertion, extradition, court-martial, and perhaps——”

“ Oh, no, Uncle John, I am sure you do not need to fear anything of the kind,” Josephine eagerly interposed. “ I know Louis Arnold well enough to feel certain that you would receive only kindness and consideration from him. He does not believe in resentment or retaliation; his religion forbids it, and I know that you—*we*—will never know another happy day until this wrong is made right.”

The man turned a wondering look upon her. She had said “ *we*,” as if she held herself responsible

with him, and meant to share whatever came to him, to the bitter end; and this voluntary clinging to him, in spite of everything, did more toward breaking him down than anything that had yet occurred.

“I see where you stand,” he said dejectedly, “and I may as well admit the truth. I am that deserter who sought refuge with John Sherburne’s widow. My regiment had been ordered abroad on a very perilous campaign. Some of our officers were brutal men, who made the lives of those under them a burden; while my captain—I was an orderly—held a bitter grudge against me, and I vowed that I would not serve under him. I made my escape just as we were on the point of sailing. I had saved considerable money, over and above a windfall of a couple of thousand pounds from my mother, who had died a few months previous, and most of this I paid for John Sherburne’s discharge. I immediately came to this country; but a few years later I saw in a New York paper an inquiry for the nearest of kin to James Wilton Sherburne, second son of the late John Sherburne of —shire, England, and the devil suggested that I make a try for whatever property he had left. I succeeded in my scheme, without a hitch, and immediately returned to the United States, for naturally I felt safer here than in England. Very soon afterwards I met your aunt Madeline and married her, and—you know the rest. With money at my command, I at once began to make more. I knew I was flourishing on what

did not really belong to me, and sometimes uncomfortable thoughts of that widow and her daughter would force themselves upon me, and I used to tell myself that if I could find them I would do something handsome for them if they were in need. I supposed they were still living somewhere in England; but about ten or eleven years ago I ran across Louis Arnold, ragged and barefooted, at a county fair in New Hampshire——”

“How strange!” murmured Josephine in surprise.

“Strange! it was fate—relentless fate!” returned her companion dejectedly, then resumed: “I knew at once that the boy was a Sherburne, for he was the image of his mother at the same age; and her pathetic face and great dark eyes had often haunted me. Your aunt and I had been up in the mountains for a few weeks. We were on our way to make your folks a visit, before coming home to Chicago, and we stopped off to see the racing at the fair. I was so upset the moment I saw the little tramp, I sought him out and questioned him about his family. He corroborated my suspicions regarding his identity, by telling me that his mother was born in England and that her maiden name was Annie Judkins.”

Mr. Sherburne then related how his wife had found the photographs Louis had lost; how, later, Miss Wellington had discovered them while cleaning the library, and of his recent interview with Joe Dawson.

"Well, I suppose it was to be my fate and I have got to face it," he grimly observed in conclusion.

Josephine leaned forward and smiled into his eyes.

"Miss Wellington would tell you that it was truth, mercy, and justice leading you, step by step, to your salvation," she said softly.

"Salvation? No, to shame, humiliation and ruin would be more to the point," he groaned. "Do you realize, child, what it would mean for me to right this wrong, as you put it, just from a financial standpoint alone?"

"I do not know, Uncle John, what your fortune amounts to, but I have made a rough estimate of legal interest on twenty thousand pounds for thirty-five years and it almost took my breath away," Josephine gravely returned.

"And well it might; for it would make beggars of us both," he curtly retorted.

"Of course the loss of this money would seem harder to you than to me, for you have accumulated most of it yourself," said Josephine thoughtfully. "But you still have your talent for business, and if I can get a school we will make a little home for ourselves somewhere, and I am sure we will be very comfortable."

The man studied her fine face for a moment, an intensely yearning expression in his eyes.

"Then you wouldn't utterly repudiate your old uncle, after learning how deeply dyed——" he began; but Josephine would not allow him to go on. She gently laid the tips of her fingers upon his lips to check him.

"What am I that I should judge you?" she questioned sadly. "That was why I told you of my high school experience. You have been tempted in one way, I in another, and we both have fallen; though, to me, it seems worse to rob a person of her reputation than to take money that belongs to another."

Her listener groaned again as he saw how she was trying to lighten his burden by criminating herself.

"But we need not fall again," she went on, in a brighter tone. "Another temptation has come to us, and we are not going to yield to it; we are going to do as nearly right as we can, and so atone, in some measure at least, for the past."

"And if I will not?" he questioned as she paused.

"Then—forgive me, Uncle John, if I say something that may sound hard and ungrateful after all your kindness to me; but I—you—we——"

"Yes, I understand," he supplemented as she faltered and her voice failed utterly. "We could not preserve our present relations. You would not remain with me to share what seems to you my ill-gotten wealth."

His tone was exceedingly bitter from his own mental anguish. What had hurt and humiliated him most was the fact that Josephine had felt it necessary to abase herself to his level, revealing the conflict between good and evil in her own consciousness, even to the extent of unveiling the most sacred recesses of her lacerated heart.

The girl realized that he was suffering keenly; so,

without replying directly to what he had said, she slipped her hands over his arm, closely interlacing her fingers around it, and, leaning her fair head against his shoulder, pleaded:

"You will right this wrong, you will begin over again, and I shall never leave you. We are both strong and well, and I am not afraid or ashamed to work; and if we have each other and love each other we can be happy together. Oh, you will make this a *voluntary restitution*, will you not?" she went on, her voice quivering with the intensity of her desire. "Then there need be no publicity about it. Only we four people would ever know anything about it; and that would be so much better than—compulsory reparation."

"Josephine! Would *you* make it compulsory?" questioned the man in a startled tone.

The girl suddenly arose to her feet, catching her breath sharply, and stood before him with uplifted face and clasped hands.

"Oh, don't—*don't* make this too hard for me, Uncle John," she almost sobbed. "But I could not bear to live and keep such a secret."

John Sherburne also leaped to his feet, put out his arms and drew her into them, his features working convulsively.

"I will not ask you to keep it, Josephine," he said brokenly. "You have conquered. You shall have your way, and I will do the best I can—even to the last farthing—to make restitution. Now, dear, neither of us can bear any more to-night. Go to

your room and rest, and let me think; then to-morrow we will make a beginning in the right direction."

He led her to the door and opened it for her to pass out; but she clung to him for a moment as if loth to leave him. Then, lifting her shining eyes to his, she murmured: "Thank you, Uncle John." It was all she could say, but leaning toward him she touched her lips to his in a light caress, and was gone, leaving him with the feeling as of one who has received a heavenly benediction.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN SHERBURNE spent the night in his library looking over and filing numerous papers, examining accounts, and computing interest.

Morning found him pale and worn; but there was a restful look in his eyes, and he had a composure of manner that bespoke an easier conscience than he had known for many a long day.

Josephine slept like a baby the whole night through, and came down to breakfast feeling both strengthened and refreshed. She still showed traces of her recent trying experiences, but the expression of suffering and anxiety had faded from her face, and she appeared more like herself than she had done since Christmas.

Before Mr. Sherburne left for his office he drew Josephine aside to say that he would like her to tell Miss Wellington what she had discovered and the result of their conversation the previous evening, and ask her to inform Louis regarding the matter and have him appoint an early interview.

Accordingly, Josephine sought Miss Wellington as soon as she returned to her rooms after she had given her orders for the day.

"I have come to ask, Miss Wellington, if you still have that box of old letters you were looking over

the other day?" she inquired, coming to the point at once.

"Yes, dear; Louis has not been here since to ascertain the result of my examination, which did not amount to much, after all," the lady replied, although she felt a trifle surprised that Josephine should refer to the matter again.

"I am glad," Josephine quietly returned. "And would you mind getting out that old leather case again? I have something important I would like to tell you about it."

Miss Wellington looked rather mystified at this request, but, making no comment, she went to her closet, brought forth the box and set it upon her work-table, where, removing the cover, she found the case and passed it to Josephine.

But the girl did not offer to take it. She simply said:

"Please open it and look between the leather and the oil-silk lining, where the case folds together."

Miss Wellington obeyed, found the slit in the lining, and, with a face expressive of mingled emotions, drew forth the folded paper that had been hidden there for so many years.

With trembling fingers, for she was strangely impressed by Josephine's manner, she began to unfold it, when the girl interposed, saying:

"Before you read it, I want to tell you that the other day, after you went downstairs, I felt a curiosity to examine the case again; and, while doing so, I found that paper. Without stopping to think that

I was prying into other people's secrets, I opened it. Perplexed and startled by the names at the top of the sheet, I read on until I learned the whole story. Read it now yourself, dear Miss Wellington, and then I have more to tell you."

The woman, a sense of weakness coming over her, sank into her chair and obeyed, her face betraying her amazement and other conflicting emotions as she mastered the contents of the sheet.

"This is wonderful!" she said, as she finished it. "And it is also very perplexing. I cannot fathom it."

She was thinking of John Sherburne, of the photographs which she had found in his library—how he had claimed them as family pictures; how she had afterwards rescued them from the rubbish; and later Louis had declared that they were some he had lost; and the more she thought the deeper the mystery grew.

"That is what I am going to explain," said Josephine, coming to the rescue; and then she related the whole story, as we have already learned it, but leaving out, of course, what she had revealed to Mr. Sherburne regarding her former enmity toward Margaret and her unfortunate attachment for Louis.

She told it clearly, simply, truthfully; and, while she did not attempt to excuse or shield her guardian for the great wrong he had done, she charitably avoided all condemnation, giving him what credit she could for now being willing to do his utmost

toward reparation, and made her own agency in the matter as inconspicuous as possible.

But Miss Wellington, being a good judge of human nature, had read the man well. While she knew that he possessed some good qualities, she believed there was a lack of principle in his make-up that often led him to do many reprehensible things. She knew he was ambitious, grasping, and extremely stubborn, and she realized that it had been no light task for this girl to boldly face him, reveal her knowledge of his crime, and persuade him to make restitution, when such amends could not fail to mean the giving up of a large part, if not the whole, of what he possessed, besides laying himself liable for crime. When Josephine concluded Miss Wellington laid a tender hand upon the girl's shoulder.

"My dear, what a miracle is this that you have wrought!" she said, a solemn sweetness in her tones. "The restoration of this money is but a small part of it—you have been John Sherburne's salvation, for I believe he will be a different man after this—that this will be the beginning of his real life. For your own part, you have manifested a spirit of self-abnegation that is beautiful; for, by insisting upon the restoration of Louis' heritage, you have nobly obeyed the golden rule of love—even to the extent of impoverishing yourself—and love, you know, is the fulfilling of the law."

In her heart the woman knew that Josephine had sacrificed far more than a fortune in what she had done; but that was a matter she did not feel at liberty

to touch upon, though she longed to whisper a word of comfort in her ears.

As Miss Wellington concluded, Josephine slid from her chair to her knees and wound her arms around the woman's waist.

"Dear Miss Wellington," she said, "you have helped me to do this. You have been my inspiration for good ever since I came here. You are so absolute in your ideas of right and wrong. Margaret and Louis were my models when we were in school together; somehow they seemed to be governed by a stronger regard for principle than most people, and since I have been here with you I have begun to realize more what that principle is. You never will strain a point or countenance the slightest deviation from right; but you are so gentle and loving, so sweet about it no one can take offence. All this has made me feel more and more that life is only worth living as it is rightly lived. But it was not easy for me to take this stand—either for myself or for Uncle John. Oh, I have never wanted my mother so much as during the last few weeks!" she concluded with a yearning sigh, as she dropped her head upon Miss Wellington's breast to conceal her brimming eyes.

The woman gathered her close to her, a great wave of tenderness surging over her heart.

"My dear," she said softly, "just let yourself rest in the motherhood of God and be comforted."

"The motherhood of God," repeated Josephine looking up with wide, wondering eyes.

"Have you never thought of that before?" questioned the elder woman, with a luminous smile. "As a rule, people have regarded God as a father, ascribing to Him the strong attributes of authority, guidance and protection; but if He is *all*, then He must include within Himself the gentleness, love and tenderness of a mother."

"The motherhood of God!" said Josephine again, lingering over the words. "It is a beautiful thought; and, I am sure, even though you have never been a mother yourself, you must have a great deal of that element stored away in your heart, for you are so tender, loving and sympathetic toward others, you make everybody love you. I wonder," a sudden rush of tears again suffusing her eyes, "if you will let me call you Aunt Martha?"

"Why, yes, dear heart, if it will be any comfort to you; and I am sure it will be very pleasant to me to hear the familiar name from you. I have been Aunt Martha to quite a number of young people in my day," Miss Wellington concluded with a bright little laugh as she dropped a soft kiss on the girl's lips to seal the compact.

"And now," she resumed in a more matter-of-fact tone, "I think we might as well have Louis here as soon as possible and get this matter straightened out. I believe I will write him to call to-morrow evening."

"I wish you would, Miss—Aunt Martha," Josephine corrected herself with an arch smile. "I shall be very glad when it is all over."

A little later Miss Wellington sent a message to Louis saying she had something of importance to communicate to him, and asking him to bring the photographs which she had recently given him, and to come if possible on the following evening.

He made his appearance at an early hour, whereupon Miss Wellington gave him a detailed account of what Josephine had disclosed, and showed him the record and statement which had so long been concealed in the old leather case.

Louis was of course greatly surprised, and said he could now understand why the photograph of the English soldier had been preserved with those of the other members of his family—a circumstance which had been a great puzzle to him ever since it had come to light.

After talking the matter over at length with Miss Wellington, Louis said he was ready to meet Mr. Sherburne, and a maid was sent to tell that gentleman that Mr. Arnold had called to see him.

Mr. Sherburne came directly to the drawing-room and greeted the young man with grave courtesy, then invited him to accompany him to his library.

Here, requesting his guest to be seated, he at once broached the all-important subject which they had met to discuss and briefly reviewed the whole situation.

Louis regarded the man with surprise as he talked, for he seemed greatly altered. The somewhat pompous, consequential air which, hitherto, had been habitual to him, had altogether disappeared;

and, while there was nothing cringing or surly in his manner, there was a settled gravity, a straightforward grappling with the business in hand which betrayed a radical change in him. He did not spare himself, but frankly confessed everything connected with his desertion from the army and his subsequent career, in so far as it related to his dealings with the Sherburne family.

He told him how, after meeting him at the county fair, he had been haunted by the fear that he might some day be overtaken by retribution. This fear had grown upon him after the young man came to Chicago to live, and, actuated by two motives, he had at once made a place in his office for him. One of these motives was to salve his conscience by putting Louis in the way of making money; the other was to get him so involved in his own shady methods that, in case he ever did discover the truth, he would be so completely at his mercy that he would never dare to turn upon him and demand restitution.

He related how terrified he had been upon encountering Joe Dawson; how he had immediately adopted Josephine and settled his property upon her, hoping thus to secure—beyond the possibility of loss—a future of affluence to himself and her.

Money had been his god, he said, and he probably would never have parted with any portion of his fortune, to right this wrong, but for the discovery Josephine had made and the relentless stand she had taken.

"It would have been far better for my peace of mind if I had voluntarily done the square thing by you ten years ago, when I first discovered your identity," he remarked in conclusion. "It would have saved me the humiliation of being found out and compelled to do my duty by the girl I love as an own daughter. However, when it came to the alternative of choosing between the two, I found that I could better bear to part with the money than with Josephine. I can never tell you what it means to me to know that she loves me well enough to stick to me in misfortune, and that there was something in me—bad as I am—that responded to the good in her. Now"—straightening himself with a jerk and reaching for a paper that lay on his desk—"we will get down to business. After that is settled, I am at your mercy, and you can take what legal proceedings the case may seem to demand. I came into possession of those twenty thousand pounds in 18—, and I have computed the interest to date at the rate the banks are paying to-day. Look these figures over, if you please, Arnold, and see if they are right."

Louis took the paper, but merely glanced at the last figures on the page. He knew that the broker's estimate must be correct. He sat quietly thinking for a few moments, then passed the sheet back to his companion.

"It is a big sum, Arnold," said John Sherburne with dry lips, while he curiously searched the young man's serious face. "When such an amount gets

to compounding, it rolls up fast; and Louis—I haven't enough to meet it. I can't meet it within thousands of dollars. Now what have you to say about it?"

"Mr. Sherburne, you do not need to meet it," Louis quietly returned. "You may simply turn over the principal to me, and we will regard the account as settled; moreover, I shall institute no legal proceedings against you."

"What is this?" almost gasped the broker in amazement. "You will not demand any interest for the use of this money for all those years?"

"No, sir."

"I don't understand you, Arnold. Who ever heard of any one refusing a fortune like that? Why, the principal has repeated itself many times?"

"I know that; but——"

"Is this Quixotic idea supposed to be—coals of fire?" sharply demanded Mr. Sherburne, and growing suddenly crimson under the thought.

"No, Mr. Sherburne, such an attitude had not suggested itself to me," said Louis gravely. "It would be no satisfaction whatever to me to bring the law to bear upon you, either for your desertion from the English army, or for appropriating the fortune left by James Wilton Sherburne. To me that would seem like an unworthy act of retaliation, of which I would not be guilty after you had voluntarily sought to make amends to the extent of your ability to do so. Regarding this interest as you

have computed it—I simply prefer not to have it; that is all.”

John Sherburne studied the young man in deep perplexity. The stand Louis had taken was beyond his comprehension.

“I swear,” he at length burst forth, “I don’t understand you. I appreciate your leniency in refusing to take any public action against me, but I imagine that is more on Josephine’s account than my own; all the same, I am grateful to you for the consideration. But about this money, it is rather tough on a man when he is ready to do the right thing that he can’t be allowed the privilege.”

Louis grew uneasy at this point, changed his position, crossed and recrossed his legs and seemed generally uncomfortable.

“Please let us leave it just here,” he began, when his companion suddenly exclaimed:

“Aha! perhaps it is because you may regard it as tainted money,” and Louis’ conscious flush told John Sherburne that he had fathomed his motive.

“Well, it is tainted. I can’t deny it,” he hoarsely exclaimed. “But it is all I have—it is all I can offer you.”

“Then let the matter rest as I have said, Mr. Sherburne,” Louis responded in a friendly voice. “I am satisfied with the principal; more than that I cannot take. It is a handsome windfall, and all that I feel rightly belongs to me; while—if you will allow me to make the suggestion—if what remains will enable you to give others a helping hand in the same way, I should much prefer such a dis-

position to be made of it. There is E. A. Rollins, for instance, who put five years' savings—all he had—into that mine and lost it."

"I will—I will," Mr. Sherburne assented with a gesture which showed that he was deeply moved. "That was too bad about Rollins. I felt it at the time. And, Louis Arnold," he went on huskily, "you are a clean, true-hearted fellow if there ever was one; you are surely trying to live up to what that wonderful woman, Martha Wellington, has taught you—you have shown to-night that you love your neighbor as yourself, and she has a right to be proud of her 'boy.' I can't stand any more to-night," he added, rising, his face an ashen gray, "but I will attend to this business at once and will deposit the amount you have named to your credit in the First National Bank within a few days. I thank you for your suggestion, and, in so far as I am able, I will do as you wish. Good-night, Arnold, and some time I hope you will allow John Sherburne—if you do not object I will retain the name, as it would be awkward to change it—to call you his friend."

Louis also arose and frankly extended his hand.

"I shall be glad to regard you as my friend from this hour, Mr. Sherburne," he cordially returned. "And if there should ever come a time when I can serve you, I hope you will command me. Good-night."

The two men shook hands and parted, when Louis again sought Miss Wellington to tell her the result of the important interview.

Miss Wellington was almost overcome upon learning of the stand which Louis had taken regarding his patrimony and his suggestion as to the disposal of the accrued interest.

"You have done a beautiful and noble thing, dear boy," she said, with tremulous lips—"a deed that will live and bear much fruit. As I look back and see how, step by step, you have advanced from a good and obedient child to a cultured, high-minded man, my heart is filled with joy, and I know as you go on the world will become a better place because you have lived in it."

"But, Aunt Martha, it is you who have led me, step by step; and whatever unfolding of good there has been in my life I owe chiefly to you and what you have taught me," Louis returned. "I know that I am deeply indebted to the Westons and Mr. and Mrs. Richards, but your influence during those earlier years, and your faithful guidance along the way, even when we were separated, have done more toward moulding my character than anything else." And he sealed his loving tribute to her by lifting the hand he was holding and laying it reverently against his lips.

Our story is nearly told. John Sherburne had ever been alert and energetic in working for his own interests, and now, having resolved to do right, he proved himself no less active in trying to atone for his misdeeds. Instead of being crushed by what had occurred, he appeared, after the first shock had passed, to rise above it to a new sense of manhood.

This was specially manifest after a long and confidential chat which he sought with Miss Wellington.

"You do not need to use too much sackcloth and ashes, my friend," she had said, in response to some of his expressions of self-condemnation. "It is only a waste of time and energy to wallow in the slough of despond. You have seen your errors, you have repented of them. Now all you have to do is to let that repentance bring forth results and—rejoice."

"Rejoice!" repeated her listener in a doubtful tone.

"Why not?" she queried, with a cheery smile. "When evil has been cast out of us have we not cause for rejoicing? Instead of getting rid of our sins and their results, we are only clinging to them when we grieve over them continually. When our Master cast evil out of anyone He said: 'Go and sin no more'—that is, 'Go on, leave your mistakes behind you, take up the duties before you; but be careful not to repeat the wrong.' Now, I'm going to quote Scripture again," she interpolated, with a little laugh: "'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.' This light has come to you, Mr. Sherburne, and you should rejoice and be glad, instead of wasting time by looking back and mourning over the darkness. Make use of the light you have received and go up higher."

This practical talk did the man great good, and he immediately went about his business with a lighter heart. It took time to straighten his affairs, but in a few weeks Louis' patrimony was set aside for him, as promised; and as time went on matters of

a similar nature were adjusted for others in so far as Mr. Sherburne was able to make them right.

By the end of six months, although nearly bereft of his once ample fortune, he found himself fairly started again in a way to make an honest living; while Josephine was installed as mistress of a prettily furnished apartment with a competent maid-of-all-work as her only assistant. She had almost carried her point to become a teacher, but finding that Mr. Sherburne was going to be really miserable under such an arrangement, she finally yielded, and gradually found she was growing happy and light-hearted again in devoting herself to him.

Miss Wellington remained with them until they were settled; then, after a visit to her Colorado relatives and a trip to her old home in New Hampshire, she went to Louis, who needed her assistance in preparing a home for himself and the bride he expected to bring to it in the near future.

Louis had made himself so useful to his employer and so thoroughly conversant with the lumber business, which he grew to like more and more, that Mr. Buskirk had proposed that, at the beginning of the following year, they cast in their lot together and become equal partners. Thus, as his proposals were generous and the business in a flourishing condition, Louis' future was opening out most auspiciously before him.

Meantime Mrs. Lawrence and her son had come West and were living in one of the suburbs of Chicago, Ted going to and from his office every day. Margaret followed them late in June, upon com-

pleting her year as teacher in Smith College, and with the expectation of going to her own home in October.

Margaret, upon learning of Josephine's agency in righting the wrong against Louis, felt that there would henceforth be a stronger bond than ever between them, and this was abundantly proven by their never-changing friendship which was a life-long joy to them.

About a month after Margaret's arrival in Chicago a letter was received from Nellie Evarts containing the not unexpected announcement of her engagement to Charlie Osgood, who had joined the Evarts party in Switzerland early in June. They would all return late in September, she wrote, and were looking forward to a delightful reunion at Margaret's wedding in October.

A couple of years after the marriage of Margaret and Louis, Ted, who—ever since Nellie Evarts' class reception five years previous—had secretly cherished a fond hope in connection with Josephine, persuaded her that life still held much in store for her, pleading in the words of Browning:

“Behold me! I am worthy
Of thy loving, for I love thee.”

Benjamin Weston and his good wife found, as time went on, that life in the city during the winter was, on the whole, quite attractive, particularly as they were both growing more in harmony with their daughter's religious views and had become regular attendants at her church. Then, too, Hannah and

Jerry had unexpectedly announced that they had decided a life-long partnership would be conducive to their mutual interests, and they were looking for a farm to lease, or buy, for their future home. Whereupon Mr. Richards suggested that the Weston homestead be leased to them for a term of years at a moderate price, with the understanding that the whole family spend their summers there as usual; and with this arrangement consummated to the satisfaction of all parties, the Westons henceforth regarded themselves as part and parcel of the Richards' household, each successive year finding them better pleased with the change.

Blackbird, the colt, had long since been sold at a high figure to a prominent Boston man who had a passion for fine horses, and the beautiful creature had nobly fulfilled the promise of its youth, never showing any traces of its early injury.

Ponce, though grown hoary and venerable with age, was still kindly cared for by Hannah and Jerry and never lost his fondness for Louis, always manifesting great joy whenever the latter paid a visit to the farm.

Here we must leave our friends, all of whom are still climbing, step by step, the rugged pathway of life, honestly striving to live the love that is the fulfilling of the law—that love which must eventually become the watchword of all who follow after them, until Louis Arnold's ideals are made universally practical and the true brotherhood of man is attained.



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